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GREAT BOOKS



# Great Books

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&c.

By the

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## PREFACE

*THE following chapters are reprints of papers which have appeared in the Sunday Magazine. They were written with the single desire to be of use, especially to young readers, who in these days, when books are so abnormally multiplied, are apt to overlook the rich treasures of the immortal teachers of the past.*

*F. W. F.*



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## GREAT BOOKS

I AM asked to write some papers on the subject of "Great Books" in general; to be followed by special papers on such supreme writers as Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and Bunyan. That such studies may be useful to the young, who desire the guidance of experience, I may fairly hope; and if I can impress upon the minds of serious learners the truths which I shall urge upon their attention, I feel no doubt at all that there may be some to whom I may thus be enabled to render a lifelong service. For,

I. The multiplication of books in these days is almost beyond calculation. In any mixed society of educated people it is the exception to find that there are no authors present. Of clergymen who have reached a certain age the majority have published something, if it be no more than a volume of sermons. The output of fiction is so astonishingly large that

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we cannot but wonder who are the readers of the numberless ephemeral volumes that appear and "perish like the summer fly." It is said that the subterranean rooms of a well-known circulating library are crammed with tens of thousands of volumes, chiefly novels, for which, even when they have had a temporary vogue, there is no longer any sale. It is the inevitable fate of the immense majority of writers that their publications fall more or less dead from the press, and very soon

" May bind a book, may line a box,  
May serve to curl a maiden's locks."

There are thousands of other books which, though they are useful and profitable for a time, and accomplish their intended purpose, are then naturally superseded. For such literary productions their authors never expected more than a brief existence. Yet they have not been published to no purpose. They fall like the dead leaves of autumn; but just as the dead leaves have not lived in vain, since they serve to enrich the soil into which they perish and are absorbed, so the thoughts of myriads of men, though they possess no germ of immortality, do in their own limited degree furnish a contribution, however infinitesimal, to the intellectual life of each successive generation.

But if writers are thus extraordinarily numerous, what are we to say of *readers*? What is to be *their*



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guide in an age when "of making many books there is no end"? Do we not want a new Khalif Omar to make a vast conflagration of heaps of accumulated rubbish?

II. Among this multitude of books there are *many* empty, commonplace, platitudinous books, and some positively dangerous and wicked books, though they, happily, are not numerous. And, further than this, all books, as Mr. Ruskin says, may be classed as "books for the hour or books for all time."

Now as the most general rules which I could give about reading, I should say to every young man and every young woman,

I. Make your deliberate choice, and do not attempt to read everything that comes in your way. It is not possible to know something about everything; it is rarely in our power to know everything about anything. But every one who aims at self-culture ought to have selected certain subjects about which he desires to be as well informed as his opportunities permit. Amid the vast accumulations of human knowledge there is not a single subject—not one period of history, not one sub-dichotomy of any one science, not one department of archæology—which, if we desire to obtain a secure mastery of it, will not require the study of a lifetime. If any one wishes to be a student he must make up his mind not to attempt too much. He must set aside whole realms of knowledge as not coming within the personal

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range of his limited faculties and the short span of human existence.

2. Mere indiscriminate reading of any kind should be resolutely abjured. The hasty omnivorous swallowing of all kinds of intellectual pabulum will as certainly produce mental dyspepsia as thoughtless gluttony will ruin the physical digestion. Smatterings of unassimilated knowledge are responsible for that shallow conceit of opinionated infallibility which abounds in those schools where

"Blind and naked Ignorance  
Delivers brawling judgments, unashamed,  
On all things all day long."

In no other way can we account for the prolific and portentous phenomenon, which we daily witness, of nescience taking itself for knowledge and insolently denouncing what it is utterly incompetent to understand. We might imagine that the writings of those who address the world from no higher standpoint than that of

"I am Sir Oracle,  
And when I ope my lips let no dog bark,"

could safely be left to perish of their own decay; nevertheless the tone of confident assertion imposes on whole cliques and coteries of deluded adherents; and it is because men thus win credence that we so often see

"The meanest having power upon the highest,  
And the high purpose broken by the worm."

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3. A minute's glance at many books is quite sufficient to show a practised reader whether they contain anything that will be of use to him or will not. If he sees, for instance, that they are written, as is the case with whole legions of books, from the standpoint of a stereotyped bigotry and an arrogant incompetence, he may without a qualm of conscience toss them into the benevolent capaciousness of his nearest waste-paper basket. To read useless, meaningless, tenth-rate books, written by men who make little popes of their own unprogressive opinions; by men whose incapacity is a sea without a bottom and without a shore—to read *any* books which are written without a conscience or an aim, is an inexcusable manslaughter upon time. It bears the same relation to real reading as indolent loafing does to healthy and vigorous exercise. The old advice, "*Lege, lege, aliquid hærebit,*" is very bad advice if it be meant to include dabbling in all kinds of literature. It is, however, true that even in books which are in the main worthless there are sometimes "two grains of wheat" hid in whole bushels of chaff. If we have the skill to secure these two wheat grains in a few moments they may be useful to us. But there are not many readers who have gained the power of thus eviscerating books at a glance.

4. Newspapers are in these days necessary. The air of the whole world now thrills with common sympathies, because the railroad and the telegraph

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bring the most distant regions into close contact, and there cannot be a mountain ascent in Alaska, or a volcanic eruption in Java, or a balloon sighted in the Polar Circle, without our hearing of it almost immediately. We cannot be indifferent to the history of the contemporary world ; yet the amount of time deplorably wasted by numberless readers in idly devouring scraps of disconnected and vapid intelligence is quite inconceivable. Such reading must surely be meant only for those who are

"Too weak to bear  
The insupportable fatigue of thought,  
And swallow therefore, without pause or choice,  
The total grist, unsifted, husks and all."

Ordinarily speaking, a glance of ten minutes, or even five minutes, at our daily newspaper will tell us all that we ought to know. It is, for instance, worse than useless to read through the squalid details of every police trial, or the nauseous revelations of divorce courts, or vague political conjectures, or the sensational items of "the silly season." There are papers which seem to exist for no other purpose than "to chronicle small beer." There are other papers, as Lord Coleridge said, "made up of personalities so trivial, that, prior to experience, one would have supposed they could not possibly have interested, for a single moment, in the faintest possible degree, any human being." How can we have time to think, or leave a margin to our life, if

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we spend hours every week in dabbling about what Mr. Lowell called "the stagnant goose-ponds of village gossip"? Of what advantage can it be to know that yesterday "Mr. Brown's son swallowed a hickory nut," or "Mr. Jones's cart-wheel stuck in a mud rut"? How can we inhale healthy air if we are always living in the midst of what another American writer calls "the miasma which arises out of the shoreless lakes of human ditchwater"? "In a world of daily, nay almost hourly, journalism," says Mr. Lowell again, "where every clever man, every man who thinks himself clever, or whom anybody else thinks clever, is called upon to deliver a judgment, point-blank and at the word of command, on every conceivable subject of human thought—or on what sometimes seems to him very much the same thing, on every inconceivable display of human *want* of thought—there is such a spendthrift waste of all those commonplaces which furnish the permitted staple of public discourse, that there is little chance of beguiling a new tune out of the one-stringed instrument on which we have been thrumming so long." But when the "mems" and "items" and "pars" are full of gossip, scandal, and spite; when they are like the verminiferous dust in which are incubated the germs of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness—the less we notice them the better. They are undiluted poison to the healthy soul which loves charity and truth.

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5. There is one piece of advice which I would give with intense earnestness to all. It is this: Never be tempted by curiosity to read what you know to be a *bad* book, or what a very little reading *shows* you to be a bad book. Bad books—by which I do not mean merely ignorant and misleading books, but those which are prurient and corrupt—are the most fatal emissaries of the devil. They pollute with plague the moral atmosphere of the world. Many and many a time a *good* book, read by a boy, has been the direct source of all his future success; has inspired him to attain and to deserve eminence; has sent him on the paths of discovery; has been as a sheet anchor to all that was noblest in his character; has contributed the predominant element to the usefulness and happiness of his whole life. Benjamin Franklin testified that a little tattered volume of “*Essays to Do Good*” by Cotton Mather, read when he was a boy, influenced the whole course of his conduct, and that if he had been a useful citizen “the public owes all the advantages of it to that little book.” Jeremy Bentham said that the single phrase, “the greatest good of the greatest number,” caught at a glance in a pamphlet, directed the current of his thoughts and studies for life. The entire career of Charles Darwin was influenced by a book of travels which he read in early years. On the other hand, it is fatally possible for any one—especially for any youth—to read himself to death

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in a bad book in five minutes. The well-known minister, John Angell James, narrated that, when he was at school, a boy lent him an impure book. He only read it for a few minutes, but even during those few minutes the poison flowed fatally into his soul, and became to him a source of bitterness and anguish for all his after years. The thoughts, images, and pictures thus glanced at haunted him all through life like foul spectres. Let no one indulge his evil curiosity under the notion that he is safe. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

"Oh! who can hold a fire in his hand  
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?"

Were we not warned two thousand years ago that "he who toucheth pitch shall be defiled"? And three millenniums ago the question was asked, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? or can one walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?"

6. What makes every form of bad reading such a murder of time and so entirely inexcusable is that the world abounds not only in good books, but in entire *domains* of good books. Even the "great books" of the world furnish us with an inexhaustible supply. A lifetime would barely suffice to master all the good books which exist in any noble and fruitful branch of study. If we were not such bad economists of happiness we should make better use



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of the joy and beneficence opened to us by some of these developments of human faculty. Many a man whose life is now dreary, burdensome, and pernicious, might, had he been wiser, have been able to say,

" My mind to me a kingdom is,  
Such perfect joy therein I find."

Many a sad and useless man might both have *been* good and *done* good—might both have been as happy as human life permits and a source of happiness to others—if he had learnt to take delight in the great thoughts of the wisest and holiest of mankind. There are boundless realms of beauty and of wonder and of power in the universe of God of which the intellect of the wise has learnt to decipher the meaning. There are priceless treasures full of wealth "more golden than gold" which are open even to the humblest and poorest. To neglect them is not only unwise, but pusillanimous. These days especially need courage and gladness. The struggle for existence grows every day more keen, and is a struggle between nations no less than between individuals. Amid the vast growth of populations; amid the increasing difficulties of earning an honest subsistence; amid the reactions of lassitude caused by the wear and tear, the strain and stress, of daily life; amid the depression and uncertainty created by the deepening complexity of problems yet unsolved, we need every possible counteraction of irresolution,



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weariness, and gloom. The influence of great books would enable us, more perhaps than any other influence, to acquire our own souls in confidence and peace. "He who is his own monarch," says Sir Thomas Browne, "contentedly sways the sceptre of himself, not envying the glory to crowned heads and the Elohim of the earth."

7. I might well speak of the immeasurable blessings to which any one of us might attain from even a partial knowledge of Science or of Art, of which the greatest results and the most eternal principles are set before us in many books. But I will confine my remarks to the subject of General Literature. If Science teaches us respecting Nature and her forces, and Art unfolds to us

"The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,  
Changes, surprises—and God made them all,"

Literature unfolds to us the deepest thoughts which can fill the great heart of humanity. We may, if we choose, find a purer and more exquisite delight in wise reading than in almost anything else. A few of the testimonies of eminent thinkers may help to bring this truth home to us. Cicero, the master of Roman eloquence, said that other studies are for one time, or one place, or one mood; but these studies are with us at home and abroad, in town or in the country, by day and by night, in youth and in old age; our consolation in days of sorrow, our

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exhilaration in hours of peace. Petrarch, when his friend the bishop, thinking that he was overworked, took away the key of his library, was restless and miserable the first day, had a bad headache the second, and was so ill by the third day that the bishop in alarm returned the key, and let his friend read as much as he liked. "A good book," says Milton in his famous "Areopagitica," "is the precious life blood of a master-spirit, treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." The historian Gibbon said that he would not exchange the love of reading for the Empire of India. "Books," says Cowper,

"Are not seldom talismans and spells."

Wordsworth, after saying that

" Books, we know,  
Are a substantial world, both pure and good,  
Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,  
Our pastime and our happiness will grow,"

adds,

"Nor can I not believe but that hereby  
Great gains are mine ; for thus I live remote  
From evil-speaking ; rancour, never sought,  
Comes to me not ; malignant truth, or lie.  
Hence have I genial seasons, hence have I  
Smooth passions, smooth discourse, and joyous thought :  
And thus from day to day my little boat  
Rocks in its harbour, lodging peaceably.

And certainly among the poems of Southey which will live we should place the charming lines :

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"My days among the dead are past ;  
Around me I behold,  
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,  
The mighty minds of old,  
My never-failing friends are they  
With whom I converse day by day ;  
With them I take delight in weal,  
And seek relief in woe :  
And while I understand and feel  
How much to them I owe,  
My cheeks have often been bedew'd  
With tears of thoughtful gratitude."

8. To these testimonies of great poets I will add three remarkable passages from prose writers. My object is to impress on my readers, and especially on the young, a sense of the joy and safety which they may gain from the study of great books, and I therefore wish to quote to them the weightiest authorities.

i. Here, then, is a singularly bright and beautiful passage from a mediæval writer, Gilbertus Porretanus or de la Porrée.\* He was once left alone in his monastery while all his brethren had gone for change of air to the seaside, and he wrote in one of his letters :

"Our house is empty, save only myself and the rats and mice, who nibble in solitary hunger. There

\* There were two writers of this name—one in the twelfth and one in the sixteenth century. I have not yet been able to verify the passage. It is quoted in Alex. Ireland's "Book-Lovers' Enchiridion."

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is no voice in the hall, no tread on the stairs. The clock has stopped . . . the pump creaks no more. But I sit here with no company but books, dipping into dainty honeycombs of literature. All minds in the world's history find their focus in a library. This is the pinnacle of the temple from which we may see all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. I keep Egypt and the Holy Land in the closet next the window. On the side of them is Athens and the Empire of Rome. Never was such an army mustered as I have here. No general ever had such soldiers as I have. No kingdom ever had half such illustrious subjects as mine, or half as well governed. I can put my haughtiest subjects up or down as it pleases me. . . . I call 'Plato,' and he answers 'Here'—a noble and sturdy soldier. 'Aristotle,' 'Here'—a host in himself. 'Demosthenes,' 'Cicero,' 'Cæsar,' 'Tacitus,' 'Pliny'—'Here'! they answer, and they smile at me in their immortality of youth. Modest all, they never speak unless spoken to. Bountiful all, they never refuse to answer. And they are all at peace together. My architects are building night and day without sound of hammer; my painters designing, my poets singing, my philosophers discoursing, my historians and theologians weaving their tapestries, my generals marching about without noise or blood. I hold all Egypt in fee simple. I build not a city but empires at a word. I can say as much of all the Orient as he who was

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sent to grass did of Babylon. . . . All the world is around me ; all that ever stirred human hearts or fired the imagination is harmlessly here. My library shelves are the avenues of time. Ages have wrought, generations grown, and all their blossoms are cast down here. It is the garden of immortal fruits, without dog or dragon."

ii. All readers will, I think, thank me for that bright passage from an old scholastic theologian nearly nine centuries ago. My next quotation shall be from Mr. Ruskin.

"All the higher circles of human intelligence," he says in "Sesame and Lilies," "are, to those beneath, only momentarily and partially open. We may, by good fortune, obtain a glimpse of a great poet, and hear the sound of his voice ; or put a question to a man of science and be answered good-humouredly. We may intrude ten minutes' talk on a cabinet minister . . . or snatch, once or twice in our lives, the privilege of arresting the kind glance of a queen. And yet these momentary chances we covet . . . while, meantime, there is a society open to us of people who will talk to us as long as we like, whatever our rank or occupation. And this society, because it is so numerous and so gentle . . . kings and statesmen lingering patiently in the plainly furnished and narrow anterooms, our book-case shelves—we make no account of that company—perhaps never listen to a word they would say, all day long!"

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iii. And here is one more eloquent passage from Æneas Sage :

"I go into my library, and, like some great panorama, all history unrolls itself before me. I breathe the morning air of the world while the scent of Eden's roses yet lingers in it. . . . I see the Pyramids building. I hear Memnon murmur as the first morning sunbeam touches him. . . . I sit as in a theatre: the stage is Time, the play is the play of the World. What a spectacle it is ! what kingly pomp ! what processions pass by ! what cities burn to heaven ! what crowds of captives are dragged at the heels of conquerors ! In my solitude I am only myself at intervals. The silence of the unpeopled Syrian plains, the incomings and outgoings of the Patriarchs, Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac in the fields at eventide, Rebekah at the well, Jacob's guile, Esau's face reddened by desert suns, Joseph's splendid funeral procession—all these things I can find within the boards of my Old Testament. . . . Books are the true Elysian Fields where the spirits of the dead converse, couched on flowers ; and to these fields a mortal may venture unappalled. What king's court can boast such company ? what school of philosophy such wisdom ? . . . No man sees more company than I do. I travel with mightier cohorts around me than did Tamerlane and Zenghis Khan in their fiery marches. I am a sovereign in my library, but it is the dead, not the living, that attend my *levée*."

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In my next paper I will say a few words about great separate realms of literature, such as History, Poetry, and Biography ; but here I will conclude by urging you, dear reader, to enter on this paradisiacal domain which lies ever open before your feet—these gardens rich with “the summer opulence of heaven.” You may breathe this pure and exhilarating spiritual atmosphere as you sit with those high souls whom God has illuminated with the flame of genius. Glorious leaders are waiting to welcome you, and gentle saints to sit as brethren by your side. Why need any man feel “cabin’d, cribb’d, confin’d” in pettiness, when at the lifting of a latch he may enter into “unimaginable realms of faerie”? Why need we be overworried by the fussy and the foolish, the base and the contemptible, when in books, “without travelling as far as Endor,” we may summon to our bidding the mightiest spirits of the dead? Why need we be drowned in disappointment and listlessness, as with that tide on the coast of Lincolnshire, “always shallow, yet always just deep enough to drown,” when, at the price of a few pence, we may, as it were, hear Heaven’s Seraphim choiring round the sapphire throne? Can we not escape in a moment from those whom the poet calls

“Men-slugs and human serpentry;”

and can we not be relieved from life’s worst enemies

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—vexatious, fretful, and lawless passions, “spirits of wasted energy and wandering desire, of unappeased famine and unsatisfied hope”—by communion with these kingly and radiant souls? A man who lives in this high society will walk through the world with the open eyes of wonder and the receptive mind of intelligence. He will believe in God; he will believe in Man; he will believe in Conscience; he will believe in Duty; and while he believes in these no darkness without can ever wholly quench that light within which is a reflection of the light of God Himself in the human soul. The best books of man will throw more and more widely open before him the Books of God, which are best interpreted by that chosen literature of the Chosen People, which more than all the other literature in the world is able to make us wise unto salvation.



## SPECIAL BRANCHES OF LITERATURE



## SPECIAL BRANCHES OF LITERATURE

**A**LTHOUGH great books should occupy the main attention of every student, yet I would by no means exclude the reading of other books which may be useful and even necessary, though we may be unable to call them "great." Many a book which is not great may still tend to diminish human sorrow and enhance human blessedness. It may only be "a book of the hour," and yet may help us towards the understanding of the books which are "for all time." It may live even though it dies, for it may have tended "to add sunlight to daylight by making the happy happier." It may have passed into the thoughts of many men, and so may survive in the best of all ways, by adding its infinitesimal quota to the nobler life of the world. Books doomed to swift oblivion have, of course, been multiplied to an amazing extent since the discovery of printing, but they must not be regarded as one of

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the unfortunate results of that discovery. The evil of the over-multiplication of books is more than counterbalanced by the blessing conferred by the dissemination of pure thought and wholesome knowledge. Only the fewest books—a mere infinitesimal proportion of the numbers which daily appear—survive even for a year; but the world is enriched for ever by

“ Books written when the soul is at springtide,  
When it is laden like a groaning sky  
Before a thunderstorm. They are power, and gladness,  
And majesty, and beauty. They seize the reader  
As tempests seize a ship, and bear him on  
With a wild joy. Some books are drenchèd sands  
On which a great soul's wealth lies all in heaps  
Like a wrecked Argosy's. What power in books!  
They mingle gloom and splendour as I've oft  
In thunderous sunsets seen the thunder-piles  
Seamed with dull fire, and fiercest glory-rents.  
They awe me to my knees as if I stood  
In presence of a king. They give me tears.’

Even when we recall the thirty thousand novels which have been written in the last eighty years, many of them—perhaps the majority—though doomed to oblivion from their birth, have at least afforded some passing and harmless amusement to a few. It is said that now novels are being published at the rate of five a day! In that fact young readers should see the need for careful discrimination. Why read an utterly poor and meaningless book when a lifetime is far too short to read even those which are

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really good? I would say the same of "religious" books. There are many which are full of high and pure thought. Why, then, waste time over those which are empty of all good; over books of the feeblest commonplace, or shoals of manuals of sickly, exotic, and namby-pamby devotions? Hood was right when he said

"A man may cry 'Church, church,' at every word,  
With no more piety than other people;  
A daw's not counted a religious bird  
Because it keeps caw-cawing from the steeple."

We can go to sleep without aid from the narcotic of ecclesiastical nullities, and even if we had nothing but the Bible in our hands we could well do without the books of "Priests and Pharisees, hypocrites," where they teach for doctrine the commandments of men.

I. Great books are the outcome of every age in which men have risen above the life of the savage. Even faithful students must be conscious, with deep sadness, of the time they have wasted on what was worthless and tenth-rate, when they might have been holding intercourse with the immortals. It would be impossible for me in this brief paper even to touch on the whole splendid world of Pagan literature; and yet how much does it enshrine of priceless worth! "God," as St. Peter so emphatically taught us, in language which was an echo of the teaching of the Saviour of mankind, "is no respecter

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of persons, but *in every nation* he that feareth Him, and doeth righteousness, is accepted of Him." This was why St. Paul does not shrink from quoting Menander to the Corinthians ; and a hexameter line of Epimenides to Titus ; and a poem of his fellow-countryman Aratus to the Athenians, when he was trying to impress upon them the truth that "God hath made of one every nation of men . . . . that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being." Even those who do not know Greek might with advantage read Homer in the translations of Chapman, Pope, or Cowper. Keats was no scholar, yet, after reading Chapman's Homer, he wrote the famous sonnet :

" Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen ;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne ;  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold :  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken,  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent upon a peak in Darien."

Again, Emerson has told us all he learned from

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reading an English translation of Plato ; and without knowing Greek we might learn much from Plumptre's Sophocles. Versions of the holy thoughts of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, those bright consummate flowers of heathen morality, are open to all. And, with no knowledge of Latin, a youth may yet gain delight from Dryden's or Sotheby's Virgil, or Murphy's Tacitus.

2. But I must pass on to the great realms of Christian literature.

By Christian literature we mean that vast, and indeed immeasurable, multitude of books which owes its direct origin and inspiration to the advent of Christ. They belong to many different ages and many varying epochs of human thought ; but to come under the head of distinctively *Christian* literature they must have emanated from those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who own allegiance to "Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end."

i. The first great epoch of Christian literature for six centuries is that of "the Fathers." Now, I do not, of course, recommend the study of the Fathers, as a whole, to ordinary readers ; yet almost any one might procure translations of a few writings which would throw light on a most memorable epoch, and not be without their influence on daily life. Even the earliest and least gifted of them teach us the memorable lesson of the supremacy of godliness.

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So far as genius and learning are concerned there is no comparison between such humble and ungifted men as the earliest Christian Fathers—such men, for instance, as Clement of Rome, Ignatius, or Polycarp—and the great classic writers of Greece and Rome. The early Christians could boast of no historian who distantly approached the genius of Tacitus ; of no philosophers so eloquent as Seneca, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius ; of no satirists like Juvenal and Persius ; of no men of letters like the elder or younger Pliny ; of no poet who could for a moment be compared even with Martial, or Statius, or Claudian. Yet the miracle of the Christian victory was won when Christianity was simplest, was weakest, was most despised ; when Christians were hunted into the darkness of the Catacombs, and were mangled by wild beasts in the Colosseum ; and when, nevertheless, “by the irresistible might of weakness they shook the world.” From Christ alone came the new mysterious force which gave to Christian literature, even in its crude and poverty-stricken infancy, its rapturous confidence “that, at last, the routine of vice had met its match,” and that the attainment of the loftiest ideal of manhood was open even to the humblest slave. The secrets of the glorious history of Christianity lay in the fact that the life “in Christ”—to quote the special motto of St. Paul—was a life of innocence and of hope. Amid a Paganism desecrated by putrid stains, the



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proudest heathen might well quail before the simple challenge of Tertullian, "*Nos soli innocentes sumus.*" And the hope of Christians, as it was a result of innocence, was also concomitant with peace and joy. There is one book which every one might read with interest and advantage. It is the "Shepherd of Hermas"—the "Pilgrim's Progress" of the second century. It was a book so beloved in early days that it was even read in churches as though it were a book of Holy Scripture. Intellectually it reaches no high level; but where in all the rich, but too often unhallowed, works of Pagans would you find such a sentence as this? "The Angel of Repentance is delicate, and modest, and meek, and quiet. Take from thyself grief, for it is the smoke of doubt and of ill-temper. *Put on gladness, which hath always favour before God. For every one that is glad doeth the things that are good, and thinketh good thoughts, despising grief.*" This ebullient gladness, this joy in the Holy Ghost in the midst of much tribulation, this mixture of ἀγαλλίασις and ἀφελότης as St. Luke calls them, of "buoyant exultation" and "single-hearted simplicity," were the essential characteristics—alas! in these days the too-much darkened characteristics—of early Christian life. In those old primitive Fathers we might rediscover this unique and original birthright of Christianity, this secret which of all others should be most jealously guarded by the torchbearers of Christian

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literature ;—and therewith we might recognise the truth that we

“ May not hope from outward forms to win  
The passion and the life *whose fountains are within.*”

We are told of the old Egyptian king Ozymandias, a thousand years before Christ, that he called his library “the treasure-house of the remedies of the soul.” No better description could be given of holy and noble books. They wield “the expulsive power of pure affections.” In sadness they may make us less sad, in solitude less lonely, in bereavement less utterly bereaved.

ii. What is called “Patristic Literature” continued for about five centuries. If any of my readers desire to form even a slight acquaintance with its manifold wealth I would recommend them to read some of the works of St. Gregory of Nazianzus and of St. Chrysostom among the Greek Fathers ; of Tertullian, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine, among the Latin Fathers. St. Augustine especially was a man of genius, sensibility, and eloquence ; and there are two of his works which may be said to belong to general literature, and have a never-dying interest. One is the famous “Confessions” ; the other the epoch-making “City of God.” The first—a book of a class which has been exceedingly rare—is from first to last a commentary on Augustine’s own memorable words, “Thou, O God, hath made us for Thyself, and our

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hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." The other is the first attempt to write a philosophy of history. It suggested to the Spanish writer Orosius the ground-work of his celebrated "Epitome," and its meaning is summed up in the sentence with which Orosius begins his work, "*Divina providentia agitur mundus et homo.*" It is God who sways all the destinies of the Universe and of human life.

iii. The "Patristic" epoch was succeeded by the "Scholastic." The long period of the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages produced, of course, its historians—such as our own Gildas and Bede—and a few other general writers ; but the *main* literature—and even that is comparatively scanty—consists of the theological works of the "Schoolmen," as they are called, both theologians and mystics. These rest, for the most part untouched by any but a few scholars, upon very dusty shelves. But the *Summa Theologiæ* by St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor ; and the Life of Christ by St. Bonaventura, the Seraphic Doctor ; and the impassioned sermons of St. Bernard, the Mellifluous Doctor, will always find eager readers. The most universally popular book of the Middle Ages is "The Imitation of Christ," usually attributed to Thomas à Kempis, but in which Jean Gerson, "the most Christian Doctor," probably had a share. With all its defects—mediæval and monastic as it is, expressive mainly of a cloistral Christianity, and in some directions

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glaringly inadequate—it has yet, as a whole, most powerfully and beneficently swayed the religious imagination of many generations of men, and its “brief, quivering sentences” will find a place in every earnest heart.

iv. The thirteenth century witnessed the dawn of vernacular religious poetry in “The Song of the Creatures,” by sweet St. Francis of Assisi; but about the year 1300 Dante began to write his “Divine Comedy,” which has been called “the voice of ten silent centuries.” Of that immortal poem—one of the deepest utterances which ever came from the human heart—I will not speak now, because in future papers I hope to win many of my readers to its earnest study.

v. The fifteenth century witnessed events of overwhelming significance both for Christian literature and for the general progress of mankind. Such events were the discovery of America in 1492; the invention of printing in 1449; and that awakening of the human mind known as “The Renaissance,” which received a powerful impulse from the flight of Greeks into Italy, who brought with them a revived knowledge of Greek literature, after the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453.

In my former church of St. Margaret's, Westminster, is a stained-glass window, presented to me by the printers of London in memory of William

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Caxton, the first English printer, who was one of the auditors of that church. On one side of the window you see the founder of English literature, the old monk of Jarrow, the venerable Bede, dictating to his boy scribe, just before his death, the last verse of his translation of St. John. On the other side stands Erasmus, the morning-star of the Reformation, whose troubled life was the outcome of the eager age when "Greece rose from the dead with the New Testament in her hand." Between the two stands William Caxton beside his simple printing press. Caxton's motto was "*Fiat Lux*—Let there be light"; and underneath the window are the four lines written at my request by the late Lord Tennyson :

" His cry was ' Light, more light, while time shall last ' ;  
He saw the glories growing on the night,  
But not the shadows which that light should cast,  
Till shadows vanish in the Light of Light."

Who shall attempt to estimate the immeasurable results of the Art of Printing? It has shaken the thrones of tyranny, and quenched the balefires of the Inquisition. By disseminating the thoughts of those in whose souls God has illuminated the light of genius, it may enable the humblest among us to

" Unfold  
The wings within him wrapped, and proudly rise  
Redeemed from earth, a creature of the skies."

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And—because the cause of truth, with such a power as that of the Printing Press to help it, is irresistible—the Renaissance was followed by “the bright and blissful Reformation,” which, as Milton said, “struck through the black and settled night of ignorance and Anti-Christian tyranny,” and in which “the sweet odour of the returning Gospel embathed men’s souls in the fragrancy of heaven.”

vi. After the invention of Printing the range of literature widened, and from a narrow river it became a boundless sea. Think of all the wealth of the Elizabethan age, when a galaxy of glorious men gathered round the throne of the maiden Queen, and when England could boast of such writers as Sidney, Raleigh, Hooker, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, and above all of the poet who, of all men who ever lived, was endowed with the most oceanic and myriad-minded genius, William Shakespeare. Think of the period of the Commonwealth with such sons as John Milton, and John Bunyan, and John Dryden. Think of the age of Queen Anne with such writers as Pope and Addison. And has any century in England been more prolific of splendid names than our own? We have had such poets as Burns, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Southey, Coleridge, Scott, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, and many more of brilliant fame; such novelists as Sir Walter Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot; such historians as Macaulay, Freeman,

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Froude ; such men of science as Wheatstone, Faraday, Darwin, Tyndall, and Huxley ; such men of letters as Carlyle and Ruskin ; such theologians and religious teachers as Newman, Stanley, F. W. Robertson, and Lightfoot (to mention the dead only), and multitudes of other writers of eminence whose names alone would fill the page.

3. So vast is the realm open to every young reader even in Christian and English literature ! If he choose Poetry as his field, two at the least of the supreme poets of the world, Shakespeare and Milton, were Englishmen. And what reading would be more likely to purify and ennoble than that of the poets who teach us, most sweetly, and with clearest insight, "the great in conduct, and the pure in thought" ? Do not those rare souls "enrich the blood of the world," and present us with the very bloom and fragrance of all human knowledge, human thought, human passion ? Wordsworth accepted it as his mission, "to open the eyes and widen the thoughts of his countrymen, and teach them to discern in the humblest and most unsuspected forms the presence of what was kindred to all that they had long recognised as the highest and greatest." We gratefully echo the prayer :

" Blessings be with them and eternal praise  
Who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares,  
The Poets who on earth have made us heirs  
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays."



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Or if a youth choose History as his field, is not history "the crystallised experience of humanity"—"a civil theology of the divine providence"? Is it not as Bolingbroke said, "Philosophy teaching by examples"? Surely History is as Carlyle called it "a divine book of Revelation, of which the inspired texts are great men"; and as Fichte said, "a constant inflowing of God into human affairs." Is it a small thing to have presented to us in a splendid drama the reasons why empires rise and fall; the solid rules of civil government;

"What makes a nation happy and keeps it so;  
What ruins kingdoms and lays cities flat?"

Is it no furtherance of all that patriots most fervently desire to be taught by age-long demonstration, that "Righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is the reproach of any people"?

Or if a student choose Biography for his favourite branch of study, Biography will show him every type of man, the innocent and the guilty, the strenuous and the idle, the happy and the wretched; as well as (for his warning) the multitude who are neither one thing nor the other, the half-and-half souls, the neutral Laodiceans. Thus we may make the dead live again to show us how to guide our lives, by avoiding their errors, and imitating their good examples. Who shall say how much we may gain by thus



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“ Musing on the little lives of men  
And how they mar that little by their feuds ? ”

What inexhaustible treasures are here ! Yet if the youth would really enjoy them “ he must not only listen, but *read* ; he must not only read but *think*. Knowledge without common sense is folly ; without method it is waste ; without wisdom it is fanaticism ; without religion it is death.” The reading of all other books will fail in its best object if it does not enable him to read and understand the Book of Books, of which it has been truly said that “ its light is like the body of heaven in its clearness ; its vastness like the bosom of the sea ; its variety like scenes of nature.”



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I N my two first papers I have tried to show you how the works of God's most gifted sons,

"Our loftier brothers, but one in blood,"

may brighten our lives, enlarge our intellects, widen our sympathies, uplift us above the greed, the narrowness, the querulous discontent, the vulgar selfishness which are the curse and bane of so many lives.

I will now speak of a great Puritan writer, from whose simple vividness and keen insight into human nature we may all learn lessons of lifelong value.

He enforced for us the great truths of righteous-

\* Bunyan born, 1628. Battle of Naseby, 1645. Execution of Charles I., 1649. Bunyan's marriage, 1649. Begins to preach, 1657. Bedford Jail, 1660. Released but again imprisoned, 1666. "Grace Abounding," 1666. Liberated, 1672. "Pilgrim's Progress," 1678. "Holy War," 1682. Dies August 31, 1688.

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ness which he had himself learnt in the books of Experience and of Scripture, which are the eternal books of the living God.

John Bunyan was born at Elstow, in Bedfordshire, in 1628, the year in which the House of Commons forced Charles I. to consent to the Petition of Rights. Milton was a son of the middle classes; the father of Shakespeare was a respectable tradesman; but Bunyan was the son of a tinker, in days when tinkers were mostly regarded as gipsies and vagabonds. "I was," he says, "of a low and inconsiderable generation, my father's house being of that rank that is meanest and most despised of all families in the land." It was this working-tinker in whom God kindled the light of holy genius, to which we owe "The Pilgrim's Progress from Earth to Heaven."

"Not to the rich He came, nor to the ruling,  
Men full of meat, whom wholly He abhors;  
Not to the fools, grown insolent in fooling,  
Most when the lost are dying at the doors.  
This is His will; He takes and He refuses,  
Finds Him ambassadors whom men deny,  
Wise ones, nor mighty, for His saints He chooses,  
No! such as John, or Gideon, or I."

Bunyan's childhood fell in a time of wild religious and political ferment, and in an age when men's beliefs were more concrete, less shadowy, more intensely real than now. Born with a vivid imagina-

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tion, he was, even in his childhood, so conscious of his boyish faults that he was scared and affrighted with fearful dreams and visions of devils. He fell into the sins of swearing and lying, and looked with terrified misgiving and remorse on amusements which in themselves were perfectly innocent. He had no books except the romance of St. Bevis of Southampton, and the Bible, of which he understood every word in the most literal sense.

Thousands of youths in England at this moment are leading lives ten times more vicious and godless and self-indulgent than that of this tinker's boy, without feeling one twinge of his terrible remorse. So sensitive was his conscience that, at a single rebuke, he gave up the habit of swearing, into which, from early years, he had unconsciously fallen.

"As I was standing at a neighbour's shop-window, and there cursing and swearing after my wonted manner, there sat within the woman of the house who heard me ; and, though she was a very loose and ungodly wretch, protested that I cursed and swore at that most fearful rate that she was made to tremble to hear me. At this reproof I was put to secret shame before the God of heaven ; wherefore, while I stood there, hanging down my head, I wished that I might be a little child again, that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing."

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He was twice saved from drowning, and once from the bite of an adder; and it is said that once, when he had enlisted in the Puritan army, a sentinel who had asked to take his place was shot through the heart. This deepened his conviction of a Divine Providence over him, and made his conscience still more acutely sensitive, though he was entirely free from all the more flagrant and debasing forms of vice. At nineteen he married an orphan girl, and worked steadily and skilfully as a tinker. His wife was a good Christian; and he derived benefit from the two books—"The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven" and "The Practice of Piety"—which were her only dower. But Bunyan was living in an age when men had seen the hollowness of a functional religion, and had realised that their souls had to do with the living and eternal God, who will tolerate no shams. He became convinced of the necessity for a new birth, and conscious that he had not attained to it. So terribly was he in earnest, that he was even morbidly conscientious. "I durst not take a pin, or a stick, though but so big as a straw, for my conscience now was sore, and would smart at every touch. I could not now tell how to speak my words, for fear I should misplace them. Oh, how gingerly did I then go, in all I did or said! I found myself as on a miry Bog that shook if I did but stir; and was as there left both of God and Christ, and the Spirit, and all good things." This



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unhealthy self-introspection drove him to the very verge of madness. He became sorry that God had made him a man. He blessed the condition of the birds, beasts and fishes ; he envied even the dog or the toad, for they had not a sinful nature ; they were not obnoxious to the wrath of God. He felt himself haunted by devils. An old copy of Luther's "Commentary on the Galatians" brought him comfort for a time ; but then, as a bird shot from a tree, he fell into despair, until voices from heaven seemed to comfort him, and at last the clouds and thick darkness which had so long enshrouded him broke, and were scattered, and thenceforth he enjoyed in his inmost soul the sunlight of God's peace. After this he became so happy that he felt inclined to go out, and tell even the crows on the ploughed fields of his great joy.

We need not further follow the story of his life. While still a young man he was called to the ministry among the Baptists in 1657, and at the Restoration was imprisoned in Bedford Jail, because he would not promise not to preach among his fellow-believers. For twelve years he continued in prison, for conscience' sake, supporting himself and his wife and children by making tags for boot-laces. The parting from his loved ones, he says, "was often as the pulling of his flesh from his bones." He thought that he was leaving them to wants, hardships and miseries, "especially my poor blind child, who lay

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nearer my heart than all I had besides. 'Poor child,' thought I, 'what sorrow art thou like to have for thy portion in this world! Thou must be beaten, suffer hunger, cold, nakedness, and a thousand calamities, though I cannot now endure the winds to blow on thee. But yet,' thought I, 'I must venture all with God, though it goes to the quick to leave thee.'" Thus, as sincerity had triumphed in his conversion, so conscience triumphed over the severest temptations in making him ready to give up everything rather than duty.

How amply God repays, how infinitely He rewards, those who sacrifice everything for Him! If they have persecutions, they have also the hundredfold recompense here on earth, and, in the world to come, life everlasting. It is to Bunyan's imprisonment that he owes his immortality, and what was infinitely dearer to him, the beatitude of conferring untold benefits upon the children of God.

For it was in prison that he wrote his "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," which is his spiritual autobiography; and also the immortal "Pilgrim's Progress from Earth to Heaven."\* When I was young it was rare to find a child, that could read at all, who had not read "The Pilgrim's Progress"; but in these days I find many who know little or nothing of this immortal book. Should this be the case with any who read this paper, I

\* The third, and complete, edition appeared in 1679.

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trust that they will at once repair the loss, and learn some of the most sacred and serious of all human lessons clothed in a story full of charm, which they may each purchase for themselves for a few pence, and which they will value thereafter, as a lifelong possession.

"As I walked through the wilderness of the world," so the story opens, "I lighted on a certain place where there was a den (Bedford Jail), and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, a man, clothed in rags, standing with his face from his own home with a book in his hand, and a great burden on his back."

The man is Christian, or, in other words, Bunyan himself; the book is the Bible; the burden is the load of his sins. The history of his wanderings, perils, and compensations is more or less the history of every human soul which is not content with the base devotion to worthless things. The adventures of Christian, after his soul had once been awakened, are those which may befall each one of us on our journey from earth to that which comes hereafter. But with what beautiful, simple touches are these experiences described by Bunyan in such passages as these :—

Christian reads his roll, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully, said, "Whither must I fly?" Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over

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a very wide field, "Do you see yonder wicket-gate?" The man said, "No." Then said the other, "Do you see yonder shining light?" He said, "I think I do." Then said Evangelist, "Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the gate, at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do." So I saw in my dream that the man began to run, he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain. Now over the gate there was written, "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." He knocked therefore more than once or twice. At last there came a grave person to the gate, named Good Will, who asked who was there? and whence he came? and what he would have? "Here is a poor burdened sinner," said Christian. "I come from the City of Destruction, but am going to the Mount Zion. I would know, sir, if you are willing to let me in?" "I am willing with all my heart," said he; and with that he opened the gate. Then Christian is shown the warning scenes in the House of the Interpreter; and comes to the cross, at the foot of which his burden is loosed from off his back. After this, the Shining Ones meet him with the words, "Peace be to thee." Then we are introduced to the various persons whom he encounters upon his pilgrimage: Sloth, and Formalist, and Hypocrite, and Mistrust, and Talkative, but also Faithful and Hopeful. He falls asleep on the Hill Difficulty and loses his roll;

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he comes to the House Beautiful, where dwell Prudence, Piety, and Charity, and there he rests in the large upper chamber, whose window opened towards the sunrising, and the name of the chamber was Peace. There he is clad in the armour of God, and meets the fiend Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation. When he was on the point of being crushed, seizing his sword, he gave Apollyon a deadly wound, so that he spread forth his dragon wings, and sped him away, that Christian for a season saw him no more. The fiends whisper evil thoughts in his ears in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, but he passes through it safely and meets Faithful, who is martyred in Vanity Fair. Then, after rest in the Meadow of Lilies, he tries a bypath, and is seized by Giant Despair, and nearly killed in Doubting Castle; but he is welcomed by the shepherds on the Delectable Mountains, and so at last reaches the Land of Beulah. In that land the air was very sweet and pleasant, where they heard continually the singing of birds, and saw every day the flowers, and heard the voice of doves, and were in sight of the gates of pearl, while there the Shining Ones commonly walked, because it was upon the borders of Heaven. And so, at last, they pass the Dark River, and all the trumpets sound for them on the other side.

Scarcely less beautiful and edifying is the second part—the pilgrimage of Christiana and her boys—

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with which I have no space to deal. But let me point out one or two characteristics of these beautiful and helpful books.

i. Notice, first, the many pointed sentences in which they abound, such as these :

“Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.”

“One leak will sink a ship, and one sin will destroy a sinner.”

“When your garments are white,” says Jesus, “the world will count you mine.”

“Nothing can harm me but sin ; nothing can grieve me but sin ; nothing can make me base before my foes but sin.”

“Is it little in thine eyes that our King doth offer thee mercy ?”

“The bitter goes before the sweet. Yea, and forasmuch as it doth, it makes the sweet the sweeter.”

ii. Notice, next, the great beauty of many special passages :

(a) Here is one. After telling how Apollyon straddled over the whole breadth of the way in front of Christian, and pressed on him, throwing darts as thick as hail, and wounded him in his head, his hand, and his foot, he adds :

“In this Combat no man can imagine, unless he had seen and heard as I did, what yelling and hideous roaring Apollyon made all the time of the

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fight; he spake like a dragon; and on the other side what sighs and groans brast from Christian's heart. I never saw him, all the while, give so much as one pleasant look, till he perceived he had wounded Apollyon with his two-edged sword; then, indeed, he did smile and look upward; but it was the dreadfullest sight that I ever saw."

(b) Or take this scene. Interpreter leads Christiana and her boys "into a room where was a man who could look no way but downwards, with a muck-rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head, with a celestial Crown, and proffered him that Crown for his muck-rake; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor." It is an image of a man of this world, devoted exclusively to earthly things. "Then," said Christiana, "oh deliver me from this muck-rake!" "That prayer," said the Interpreter, "has lain by till 'tis almost rusty. 'Give me not riches' is scarce the prayer of one of ten thousand. Straws, and sticks, and dust, with most, are the great things now looked after."

(c) Take one more lovely passage:

"Now as they were going along, and talking, they espied a Boy feeding his father's sheep. The Boy was in very mean clothes, but of a very fresh and well-favoured countenance; and as he sat by himself he sung. 'Hark!' said Mr. Greatheart, 'to



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what the shepherd's boy saith.' So they hearkened, and he said :

" ' He that is down needs fear no fall ;  
He that is low, no pride ;  
He that is humble, ever shall  
Have God to be his guide.

I am content with what I have,  
Little be it, or much :  
And, Lord, contentment still I crave,  
Because thou savest such.' "

Then said the guide, ' Do you hear him ? I will dare to say this Boy lives a merrier life, and wears more of that herb called Heart's-ease in his bosom, than he that is clad in silk and velvet.' "

iii. Notice, thirdly, the wonderful vividness and reality of Bunyan's impersonations. " They are not," it has been said, " shadowy abstractions, but men and women of our own everyday world. We are not unacquainted with Mr. Byends of the town of Fair Speech, who always has the luck to jump in his judgment with the way of the times, and to get thereby, and who always walks with Religion when he goes in his silver slippers. His kindred and surroundings are only too familiar to us : his uncle Mr. Two-tongues the Parson ; his wife, that very virtuous woman my Lady Feigning's daughter ; and his grandfather who was " a waterman, looking one way and rowing another." Mr. Facingbothways, Mr. Anything, and the rest are familiar people. Nor is



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the schoolmaster, one Mr. Gripeman, of the market-town of Lovegain, in the county of Coveting, a stranger to us. Obstinate with his dogged determination, and Pliable with his shallow impressionableness, are among our acquaintances. We have before now come across "the brisk lad, Ignorance, from the town of Conceit"; and "the man, Temporary, who lived in a house two miles off from Honesty, next door to one Turnback." Shortround, and Sleepyhead, and Linger-after-lust, and Sir Having Greedy, we know them all. Where is the town which does not contain Mrs. Timorous, and her coterie of gossips, Mrs. Batseyes, Mrs. Lightmind, and Mrs. Knownothing, all as merry as the maids; and Madam Bubble, speaking very smoothly, with a smile at the end of each sentence? Nor are we entirely unacquainted with "the young woman whose name was Dull." "The mind of Bunyan," says Lord Macaulay, "was so imaginative that personifications, when he dealt with them, became men."

How marvellously picturesque again is the description of the City of Vanity Fair, with its fools, knaves and rogues, their hatred of true Christians, and their railing accusations; and as for the evidence sworn against good men by Envy, Superstition, and Pickthank, before the brutal judge, Lord Hate-good, why we hear it every day. Then went the Jury out, and first Mr. Blindman, the foreman,

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said, "I see clearly that the man is a heretic." Then said Mr. Nogood, "Away with such a fellow from the earth." "Ay," said Mr. Malice, "for I hate the very looks of him." Then said Mr. Lovelust, "I could never endure him." "Nor I," said Mr. Live-loose, "for he would always be condemning my way." "Hang him! hang him," said Mr. Heady. "A sorry scrub!" said Mr. Highmind. "My heart riseth against him," said Mr. Enmity. "He is a rogue," said Mr. Liar. "Hanging is too good for him," said Mr. Cruelty. "Let us despatch him out of the way," said Mr. Hate-light. "Then," said Mr. Implacable, "might I have all the world given me, I could never be reconciled to him, therefore let us bring him in guilty of death." And so they did. They scourged Faithful, they buffeted him, they lanced his flesh with knives, they stoned him with stones, last of all they burned him to ashes at the stake. Thus came Faithful to his end.

I have no space to speak of Bunyan's other works. His "Grace Abounding" is the spiritual autobiography of his early years before he found peace and happiness in the conviction of assured forgiveness and of the love of God. His "History of Mr. Badman" is hardly an allegory. It is a page torn out of the volume of Bunyan's daily experience. Mr. Badman is simply an ordinary, vulgar, typical English scoundrel. Even as a child he lies and

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pilfers and swears. Apprenticed to a good man, he robs him and runs away. Apprenticed to a wicked man, he neglects his work, robs the till, and exercises an evil influence on the family. He is started in business. Being tall and fair, he marries a lady with money, runs into debt, spends her dower, cheats, lies, and by base shrewdness prospers. His wife dies of a broken heart. But no man can escape the consequences of his misdeeds. In a drunken fit Mr. Badman breaks his legs and becomes seriously ill; while half-intoxicated he is tricked into a second marriage with a low woman, who squanders his ill-got "hatfuls of money," and he dies worthless and impenitent, suffering no Nemesis but that of his own brutal and selfish habits; "travelling along the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire, with such pleasures as a brute may find in them," and yet leaving us with the conviction that, even if there were no bonfire, we should prefer to be with Christian among his severest hardships.

Bunyan's "Holy War," the story of how the armies of the great King recovered the lost town of Mansoul, and how it was again partially recaptured, is another fine allegory, well worth the reading. In his later years Bunyan acquired great fame as a preacher, nor can we wonder at this, for he himself says: "What I preached I did myself feel, yea I did *smartingly* feel." When Charles II. expressed

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his surprise to Dr. Owen that a man of his learning "could sit and hear an illiterate tinker prate," "May it please your Majesty," answered Dr. Owen, "could I possess that tinker's ability for preaching I would most gladly relinquish all my learning." Amid these works, at the age of sixty, death came upon him, and in a way which all might envy: for it was in consequence of a deed of mercy. A youth, a neighbour of Bunyan's, happening to fall into the displeasure of his father, and being much troubled in mind upon that account, as also for that his father proposed to disinherit him, asked Bunyan to act as his intercessor. Bunyan, always ready for any good office, undertook the task, and used such pressing arguments against anger and passion, as also for love and reconciliation, that the heart of the father yearned towards his returning son. After this good deed he had to ride from Reading to London, forty miles, through the drenching rain. Wet to the skin and very tired, he was seized with a fever and "with a constant and Christian patience, with holy words of peace and hope, resigned his soul into the hands of his most merciful Redeemer."

It was a life good and true; and the books which were its outcome were written by Bunyan as with his heart's blood. If any reader will honestly and carefully study them, they may do him more good than many sermons. When we are struggling through the Slough of Despond, or running towards

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the Wicket Gate, or toiling up the Hill Difficulty, or shut up in Doubting Castle, or fighting Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, or engaged in our business in Vanity Fair with its multiplied temptations to ungodliness, dishonesty, and lust, we may learn many a lesson of wisdom and courage from the poor imprisoned tinker of Bedford, who died more than two hundred years ago.



# SHAKESPEARE





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NOTHING but our habitual narrowness and conventionalism prevents us from realising that the words of great souls are intended by God for our delight indeed, but, far more, for our moral illumination and for our spiritual guidance.

One of the marvels of life is that God has dowered every child of man with such priceless boons, and that the vast majority of us, His children—for whose joy and instruction He meant these blessings—remain not only to a great extent *indifferent* to them, but stupidly *unconscious* of them. Take, by way of illustration, the beauty and glory of the outer world. May we not often say with Emerson, "In this refulgent summer it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds and sweet with the breath of natural perfumes. Night brings no

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gloom with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their almost spiritual rays." And again, "How does Nature deify us with a few cheap elements! Give me wealth and a day, and I will make the pomp of Empires ridiculous." It ought to be a part of our most ordinary belief, that

"Every bird that sings,  
And every flower that stars the elastic sod,  
And every breath the radiant summer brings  
To the pure spirit, is a word of God."

Yet how few are there who habitually use to the uttermost these gracious gifts! We are ever grumbling about our poverty. How many of us realise the immeasurable abundance of true riches which God has poured upon us? To how many of us has the "glad light green of the spring leaves," the sweet season of bud and bloom, the snowdrops and violets and daffodils, the opening rosebud and the song of the blackbird, the pomp and prodigality of heaven, the crimson pageantries of sunset, the sea's "unnumbered laughter," the moon gliding in her brightness amid night's innumerable stars—to how many of us have these been a source of pure and passionate happiness, a cause of rapturous thanksgiving to Him who gave them? How many of us have been weaned by them from love of money, and selfishness, and petty malice? Yet to whom were these glories given if not to us? "God hath made everything beautiful in its time," said the Wise King

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three thousand years ago; "also He hath set the world in their hearts, so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end." "The firmament in its clearness, the beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars, the rainbow exceedingly beautiful in the brightness thereof"—all these things praise the Lord. But man is dumb. Fire and hail, snow and vapour, wind and storm fulfil His word: but man, too often, "colder than the ice, more aimless than the vapour, more inconstant than the wind," lives in fretful ingratitude and disobedient pride.

Is it not just the same with our ignorant neglect of that gift of Genius which God has kindled for us in the hearts of the world's greatest writers? Their works are in our hands, but multitudes do not care to study them, or even so much as to read them. They shine, but how rarely do we try to "climb by these sunbeams to the Father of Lights"!

"Ever their statures rise before us,  
Our loftier brothers, but one in blood;  
At bed and table they lord it o'er us  
With looks of beauty and words of good;"

and we turn from them to the mire and draff of personalities and idle talk, or waste our leisure in groping amid the verminiferous dust of malignant gossip. "Give me a great truth, that I may live on it!" exclaimed the German poet Herder. These heaven-enkindled souls offer us great truths in

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abundance ; but of how small avail is it to those on whom has fallen the serpent's curse : "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." From these high thoughts we turn to ignoble ends and ignoble amusements, and live and move and have our being in the infinite littleness of chance desires. Alas !

" Unless above himself he can  
Erect himself, how mean a thing is man ! "

In this and the following papers I wish to say a few words about an immeasurable subject. I will try to indicate some fraction as to what we may learn of life, as God has made it, from one of the most gifted souls which He ever created, William Shakespeare. I have already endeavoured to exorcise from timid minds the silly notion that, in so doing, I shall be taking any reader away from those great eternal lessons which we associate with our too narrow and technical conception of "religion." Many persons still seem to be as foolish as the Khalif Omar, who is said to have ordered the invaluable library of Alexandria to be burnt because the books must either be in agreement with the Koran or in contradiction to it, and in the first case they were needless, and in the second reprehensible ! If the sovereign lessons of the Gospel seem for a moment to be absent from what we say of literature—as they are, for instance, from large sections of the Bible

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itself—yet in all true and lofty teaching they are still as essentially present as the bottom of the ocean is present, though we see it not as we glide over its placid surface or toss upon its stormy waves.

In the Plays of Shakespeare, however, those eternal verities of God's revelation are scarcely ever out of sight. Shakespeare's mind was *saturated* with the Bible. "He was habitually conversant with Scripture," writes one commentator. "He had deeply imbibed the Scriptures," says another. His works have been called "a secular Bible"; but they are something more than secular. The good Archbishop Sharp, a friend of saints in the reign of Queen Anne, once a Dean of Canterbury, used to say, "The Bible and Shakespeare have made me Archbishop of York." "Next to the Bible," said Dr. Hugh McNeile, Dean of Ripon, "I have derived more benefit from Shakespeare than any human author; for he so thoroughly knew the human heart." Dean Milman classes him among the great Christian poets, as not merely writing on religious subjects, but as instinct with the religious life of Christianity. "He favoured virtue from his very soul," said Keble, "and led the way to sounder views even upon sacred things, and to juster sentiments concerning God Himself."

A learned and saintly English bishop has written a book entitled "Shakespeare and the Bible." In it

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he shows that, as the Bible was one of the few books to which Shakespeare had constant access, so in hundreds of passages he illustrates with unparalleled power its deepest lessons. Many truths lie in the Bible, buried under mountain-loads of perverted religionism. It needs the grandeur and truthfulness of an intellect which Heaven bestowed, to bring back not a few of the deepest truths of Scripture in their brightness and original intensity. If we never emancipate ourselves from the current misuse of the Bible, we may, like the villainous Richard III., trick out our base ends "with odd old ends stolen forth of Holy Writ," or incur the censure which Antonio passed on Shylock—

"The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose ;  
An evil soul producing holy witness  
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,  
A goodly apple rotten at the heart."

In separating the upheaped chaff of fetish-worship and Pharisaism from the wheat of true religion, Shakespeare will help us in many ways ; and we can purchase his plays for a penny apiece.

There are three benefits especially which souls who prefer fact to falsity may gain from the study of Shakespeare. One is the thrilling expression of the wisest and holiest lessons in many an isolated passage ; the second is the intense sig-

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nificance of separate scenes; the third is the deeper and more solemn insight into the meaning of life set forth in entire plays. On subjects so large I can, of course, touch but cursorily by way of specimen.

My object is only to illustrate, not to exhaust; to offer, by way of specimen, one or two grains of gold, and to point to the mine where we may dig for them ourselves.

First, then, let us notice—quite casually—Shakespeare's immortal presentation of isolated moral and spiritual truths. The convictions which Shakespeare illuminates with the glory of his genius have a universal bearing, and cannot be used for sectarian ends. Books have recently been published to prove that Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic. The attempt is futile. On the contrary, it was the Protestant type of character, and the Protestant policy in State and nation, which received impulse and vigour from the mind of the greatest of English poets. "Energy, devotion to the real, self-government, tolerance, a disbelief in machinery and materialism for the improvement of human character, an entire indifference to outward functions in comparison with the invisible life," and, it may be added, an absolute fidelity to human facts and a freedom too sacred to bow itself to the self-interested manipulations of truth, or the tyranny, at once remorseless and finical, of any form of

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juggling and usurping priestcraft, are his essential characteristics.

Here are a few of the isolated truths which Shakespeare has clothed in immortal words. Are any of us slandered or misunderstood? May we not take this comfort :

"If powers divine  
Behold our human actions, as they do,  
I doubt not then but innocence shall make  
False accusation blush."

Do any of us flatter ourselves that vice can escape punishment? Let us learn, once for all, that

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us."

Would we know the reason why God punishes the guilty? It is because "the gentle arrows in the mighty hand of God" are intended to *heal* the wounds which they inflict; and when adversity is accepted with wise submission as the natural consequence of our ill deserts, then even adversity

"Like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in its head."

In more than one passage Shakespeare brings home to us the truth that

"To wilful men  
The injuries that they themselves procure  
Must be their schoolmasters."



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Again, are we in need of comfort if sometimes we find our thoughts tormented by evil suggestions? In the "Pilgrim's Progress" Christian, as he walked through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, was sore troubled because an evil spirit was whispering into his ear the blasphemies which he feared must be his own. Might he not have learnt from Shakespeare the consoling fact that involuntary suggestions which we repudiate with horror involve no personal guilt, since

" 'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,  
Another thing to fall."

Do we desire to have impressed on our hearts the truth that self-control, self-mastery, self-possession, the acquiring of ourselves, is the secret of all noble life? Then let us ponder the rule

" To thine own self be true,  
And it must follow as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Would we learn the curse of inconsistency? Was the lesson ever more beautifully expressed than in the lines,

" How sour sweet music is  
When time is broke and no proportion kept !  
So is it in the music of men's lives."

Would we be warned against bargaining with God in favour of any sinful reservation? Hear the guilty, adulterous king exclaim,

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" May one be pardoned and retain the offence ?  
In the corrupted currents of this world,  
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,  
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself  
Buys out the law ; but 'tis not so above :  
There is no shuffling, there the action lies  
In his true nature ; and we ourselves compelled,  
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,  
To give in evidence."

How powerfully does this passage teach us the immeasurable difference between mere remorse and genuine repentance ! Sin must be forsaken before it can be forgiven ; consequently the murderous usurper, unable to pray, rises from his knees with the wearied despairing confession,

" My words fly up, my thoughts remain below ;  
Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

Would we learn that the true secret of happiness is within, not without us ? Hear the saintly Henry VI. exclaim,

" My crown is in my heart, not on my head ;  
Not decked with diamonds and Indian stones,  
Nor to be seen. My crown is called Content.  
A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy."

It would take me a large space to pursue this part of the subject, for the writings of Shakespeare are more thickly strewn than those of any other poet who ever lived with such Orient pearls as these.

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But it is important to observe *two things* about the *florilegium* of exquisite isolated passages, full of concentrated wisdom and keen insight, which might so abundantly be collected from the works of our great dramatist :

i. In the first place these passages, which are on all lips, are never fine things uttered for the sake of saying fine things. There is never anything of the attitudinising element in Shakesperian wisdom. He never goes out of his way to drag in some magnificent passage. His immortal utterances are never of the nature of purple patches sewn on some threadbare robe of which they only serve by contrast to reveal the poverty. They always occur naturally, and, so to speak, spontaneously. They arise from the subject itself, and are exactly congruous to the characters of those who give expression to them, and the emotions by which they are called forth. Hence the lustre and preciousness of these jewels is enhanced tenfold if we take them in their proper setting. They acquire fresh force and beauty from the surroundings, which give them a deeper meaning than they *can* have apart from the total lesson conveyed by the plays or scenes in which we find them. A reader who only knew Shakespeare from these isolated gems would know but little of his greatness or of the lessons which he was raised up to teach from thenceforth to all time and to all the world.

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ii. And in the second place, these beautiful passages, these wise sayings, always impress us with their own intense reality and sincerity. *They are never second-hand*; they never arise from an attempt to clothe in striking language either the common-places of universal experience or the floating reminiscences of acquired knowledge. They are the ripe fruit of personal attainment. They were won through sorrow and struggle. They speak from the heart to the heart. They have been tested by the events of actual life and very real suffering. It is true that Shakespeare's dramatic utterances belong to the characters of those who speak them, and fall into their natural place; so that we can never quote a sentiment as *his* without reference to the personage into whose lips the words are put, or the circumstances by which they were elicited. Nevertheless all the most serious and valuable of his great aphorisms have an independent worth. Shakespeare reveals himself even while he hides himself. The mere dates of his plays show the age at which they were written and the varying circumstances of his life. They fall into four periods, and a very wide difference in tone of mind separates the early comedies from his later works. "Love's Labour Lost" and "The Comedy of Errors"—even "The Midsummer Night's Dream" and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona"—written in the first period of his life (1588-1590), when he was still in the gay

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buoyancy of his early manhood, are widely separated in their general characteristics from "The Merchant of Venice," "Henry V.," and "All's Well that Ends Well," which belong to the second period (1598-1602). These again have in them none of the tempestuous passion and intense realisation of life's insoluble mysteries which we find in "Hamlet," in "Measure for Measure," "Othello," "Macbeth," "Lear," and "Timon of Athens," which belong to the third period (1602-1608). It is not till "The Tempest," written about 1610, in which Shakespeare bids farewell to his art and practically breaks his magic wand, that we find the calm and the ripe serenity of advancing years in one who by that time had escaped from the stormy billows, and, even if it were "with difficult scant breath," was able to look back from the shore at their raging foam. Shakespeare was born in 1564, and he was not far off from fifty years of age when he wrote his last play. He died in 1616, perhaps on his fifty-third birthday.

No man can absolutely hide from the world the true character of his mind. No mask can effectually or permanently conceal the real man. But wherever and however Shakespeare reveals himself in his Plays, it may be regarded as certain that he unveils his inner life with all its troubles most decisively in his "Sonnets." They were probably written between 1592-1602, and they breathe forth such

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passion as could not have been simulated. "Here, alone," says Dr. Brandes, "does Shakespeare enter the confessional." However many may be the problems with which their interpretation is surrounded, it is in these Sonnets that we hear the accents of the man himself; and they show us that Shakespeare had devoted a passionately enthusiastic and chivalrous devotion—such as was more common in ancient than in modern times, and in Southern than in Northern climates—to a beautiful youth, and also to a dark but enchanting woman; and that both affections had been treacherously betrayed. It is in the struggles through which the soul of Shakespeare passed during this period of storm and stress that we find the most decisive moment of his spiritual and mental career.\* It is to the feelings then evoked that we owe the atmosphere of lurid mystery and Titanic emotion which overhangs the chief plays of his third period. It is a happy thing to observe that amid such tempests his inner convictions of religion and his practical good sense gained the complete victory; and he was thus enabled to attain to a peaceful and prosperous middle age. Though he by no means won im-

\* Dr. G. Brandes, whose "William Shakespeare" I had not seen till after this paper was written, says of the "Sonnets," "Here and here alone we see Shakespeare himself, loving, admiring, longing, yearning, adoring, disappointed, humiliated, tortured."

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mediate appreciation from all his contemporaries, yet his great fellow-poet Ben Jonson wrote of him :

" I confess thy writings to be such  
As neither man nor muse can praise too much,"

and hazarded the prophecy which has been so amply fulfilled :

" He was not of an age, but for all time !"





## THE SCENES OF SHAKESPEARE

IF in these papers I succeed in inspiring my readers with a deeper sense of the boundless wealth of wisdom which lies in those works of Shakespeare which, in these happy days, they may purchase for a few shillings, I shall have conferred on them an unquestionable service, both positive and negative.

It will be a *positive* service, because if they learn the best lessons which perhaps the greatest of Englishmen of genius has to teach them, they may be

“Richer possessing such a jewel  
Than twenty seas though all their sands were pearl,  
Their waters nectar, and their rocks pure gold.”

It will be a *negative* service, because they will certainly thus be weaned from attempting to circumnavigate “the shoreless lakes of human ditch-water,” and will find that they may gain an endowment of

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happiness, incomparably richer and more enduring, from the eunobling study of a few great books than from the frivolous triviality which wastes time over multitudes of worthless ones.

In my last paper I said something about Shakespeare in general, and pointed to the number of isolated passages which embalm immortal truths in perfect utterance. In the next paper I will say something about one or two of his Plays regarded as a whole. In the present paper, by way of specimen, I wish to call attention to the colossal force and deep meaning of a few separate scenes.

I. It should be observed that the glory and meaning of these scenes never results from their being dragged into the play by predetermination. The plays were not written for the sake of these scenes, but the scenes evolve themselves naturally and, so to speak, spontaneously from the progress of the drama. Shakespeare scarcely ever invented the main story of his plays. He usually borrowed it from existing materials—whether of history or of fiction. But, while he was frequently indebted to English or Italian predecessors for the general outlines of his dramas, he imagined for himself the characters of the men and women whose destinies he intended to illustrate. He was thus enabled, by his unparalleled insight into the workings of the human heart, to leave these *Dramatis Personæ*

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to evolve the situations by which he carries out his proper functions as a poet and dramatist, which were "to hold as 'twere a mirror up to nature."

The men and women of Shakespeare move, act, and speak on his dramatic stage exactly as they would do on the stage of the world. We see in their self-determined destinies an epitome of life itself.

I. Let our first scene be taken from "Measure for Measure." It illustrates with most salutary power the weakening, depraving, disintegrating effects of self-indulgence upon the mind of a youth whose training and moral instruction would, but for this evil bias, have made him capable of nobler things. It shows us also how, in a mind thus vitiated, the first natural instinct of nobler disdain for what is infamous is rapidly perverted by the soft pleadings of a sensual egotism. Claudio has impaired in himself the determination to do right and at all costs to shame the devil, partly because his lot is cast amid evil surroundings in Vienna, which has become a sink of iniquity, and partly because he has freely yielded to temptation. So necessary is the effort to ameliorate the condition of the perverted city that a law has been passed by the Duke which condemns sensual offenders to death. By this law Claudio is sentenced to forfeit his life. Angelo, the remorseless deputy, is impervious to

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every consideration of compassion for Claudio's youth, spent as it has been amid the universal atmosphere of the impurity to which he has succumbed. Claudio has a saintly sister named Isabella, who is about to enter a monastery; and "the precise Angelo"—whose mercilessness is only the cloak of a deeply seated hypocrisy—in spite of his reputation for stainless purity, offers her the dreadful alternative of saving her brother's life if she will sacrifice her own honour. This proposal she repudiates with indignant horror, and having thus failed in her intercession, she goes to the prison to prepare her brother for immediate death. He has strung up his resolution to die bravely; but when he asks "Is there *no* remedy?" she is obliged to tell him that there *is*, but that it is such a remedy "as to save a head would cleave a heart in twain." He could, indeed, in one way free himself from death, but only at the cost of fettering him to shame for life. He wants to know what the remedy is; and then Isabella's misgivings about him find expression. She tells him frankly that she fears lest the fond clinging to life should give a fatal bias to his moral judgment, and she bids him remember that "the sense of death is most in apprehension." This makes him indignant. He asks:

"Why give you me this shame?  
Think you I can a resolution fetch  
From flowery tenderness? If I must die,

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I will encounter darkness as a bride,  
And hug it in mine arms."

"There spake my brother!" exclaims Isabella—rendered more confident by his asseveration—"there my father's grave did utter forth a voice." She tells him the alternative offered by Angelo; but alas! instead of blazing into indignation, he only expresses surprise, and with a deplorable giving way of every moral barrier, begins to minimise the heinousness of the sin, and to argue that, if Angelo proposed it, it cannot be so very terrible. Then he reverts at once to the awfulness of death; and when his sister reminds him that a shamed life is even more hateful, he gives rein to his imagination, and lets it revel in descriptions of the chill horribleness of the grave and of all that lies beyond it. Finally he implores his sister to let him live, and basely argues that a vice almost becomes a virtue when it is committed to save a brother's life. Then indeed all the pent-up shame and bitter disappointment of the holy maiden bursts forth! "O you beast!" she cries,

"O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!  
Die, perish! Might but my bending down  
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.  
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,  
No word to save thee."

And, in spite of his cry of anguish that she would stay and hear him, she rushes forth from the prison and leaves him.

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But how thrilling an illustration does the scene supply of the rotting away and sapping of the soul by unlawful indulgence ! Sins are never single : they are linked together by inextricable meshes. "*Whom have you ever seen contented with a single sin ?*" asks St. Augustine. The youth, who had already proved himself too weak to resist the voice of conscience, passes from the pusillanimity of self-indulgence to such base fear of death as makes him ready to clutch at any chance of life, even if it were at the expense of his sister's ruin. What a lurid warning have we here to bring home to us that he who wilfully makes but "a little nick" in his conscience will not be long ere, under the stress of temptation, he is prepared to murder it for ever by a deadly gash ! The *one* devil which a youth has willingly admitted into his soul, even if for a moment it seem to be ejected, is certain to return into the empty shrine in the company of seven other devils more wicked than itself, so that, unless he be seriously on his guard, the last state of that man will be worse than the first.

2. The next scene which we will notice is Shakespeare's study of the beginnings of drunkenness, and of the ruin which it works. And though, in the absence of "ardent spirits," which had not yet been discovered, the state of things in Shakespeare's days was not one hundredth part so disgraceful as it is in ours, yet Shakespeare keenly felt the shame

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of drunkenness as a national vice. He makes Iago say that "Your German, your Dane, and your swag-bellied Hollander" are not nearly so "potent in potting" as your Englishman; and this he says although he makes Hamlet remark of the Danes :

"They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase,  
Soil our additions."

But before I point the moral of this particular scene, let me pause to sweep away the silly and superficial error that Shakespeare thought lightly of intemperance. Again and again, and in many different ways, he shows us that he was well aware of its deadliness and loathsomeness. No wise man regards total abstinence as a fetish, but only as a special duty of patriotism and charity in his own particular case, because he specially desires to help in awakening the national conscience, and because he hopes by the force of his own example to save and strengthen other individual souls which have got entangled in the snare of the fowler. But many an ignorant denouncer of total abstinence thinks that he has quite crushed its defenders when he has quoted from Shakespeare the words "Because thou art virtuous, shall there be no more cakes and ale?" Well, but in whose mouth does Shakespeare put that quite irrelevant gibe? Into the mouth of a helpless and imbecile drunkard, the most absolutely

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contemptible character whom he has ever attempted to set forth—Sir Toby Belch. Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are, as their names intimate, two wretched and deplorable sots. Sir Toby is a cousin of Olivia the heroine, and in her conversation with Viola she describes the abyss of worthlessness into which her cousin has fallen, and agrees with the Clown that a drunken man is like a drowned man, a madman and a fool.

If there be any who are content to leave England to her national curse and her national crime without one effort to save her, such persons find a worthy advocate in the paltry creature who represents the very draff and dregs of human nature in its lowest humiliation. They will also find that Shakespeare puts "the good creature of God" argument into the mouth of his vilest criminal Iago, and the plea for "freedom" in connection with drink into that of the half-human monster Caliban.

Again and again Shakespeare shows on which side his sympathies would have lain had he lived in our day. When in "As You Like It" the aged Adam, in his robust and ruddy health, offers his services to his master Orlando, he says :

" Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty,  
For in my youth I never did apply  
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood,  
Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo  
The means of weakness and debility.



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Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,  
Frosty, but kindly."

And Henry V., the chief hero of Shakespeare's historical plays, was so afraid of having drunken soldiers that he wished every vine in France might be cut down.

Nor must any one be misled as to Shakespeare's feelings on the subject by the wit of boozing Falstaff. Genial as the fat old knight was, and much as Shakespeare evidently delighted in evolving his witty utterances, he is yet represented as a hopeless reprobate—a cheat, a coward, a liar, an intriguer. In the "Merry Wives of Windsor" every species of scorn and contumely is heaped upon him, and he meets with his deserved retribution when the Prince—who has tolerated and been amused by his humours, and by whom, on his accession to the kingdom, Falstaff expects to be promoted and enriched—turns upon him with the grave rebuke :

"I know thee not, old man ! fall to thy prayers !  
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester !  
I have long dream'd of such a kind of man,  
So surfeit-swell'd, so old and so profane,  
But being awake I do despise my dream."

Then first the grey-haired sinner realises that there is to be no more boon companionship between him and the hero-king !

The wit of Falstaff did not atone for his radical

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despicableness in the eyes of the Prince, who stands as Shakespeare's ideal of practical manliness, and who expresses the sentiments of the poet himself.

But I will pass to the special scene which I meant to bring forward. Iago, being a determined villain, has made up his mind to take revenge upon Othello, and if possible utterly to ruin him. This intended vengeance is based upon the false and foul suspicion of an intrigue of which Othello is entirely innocent, and which has no existence except in the diseased brain of Iago, who has sold himself to do iniquity. He is also determined to further his miserable chances of promotion by casting suspicion on Cassio, who holds a higher office than himself. He thus tries to entrap Cassio in a very stake-net of hell. His object is to create in the mind of Cassio a guilty love for Desdemona; and if Cassio is too faithful and noble for such a crime, yet to awaken a jealous rage against him in the rash and simple soul of Othello. Meanwhile, *pour passer le temps*, he is determined to snare him into drunkenness. He has a stoup of wine, and invites Cassio to drink to Othello's health. But Cassio is no drunkard; he has a dread of intemperance, and answers, "Not to-night, good Iago! I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking. I could well wish courtesy would invent some other way of entertainment." As Iago still presses him, he says he has drunk but

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one cup, and it has already produced on his brain more disorder than he likes. "I am," he says, "unfortunate in my infirmity, and dare not task my weakness any more." But Iago tells him it is a night of revels, and, with weak complaisance, Cassio at last yields. Iago knows that now he has him in his power, for he has already caused some young Cyprian gallants to be flushed with wine, and has so managed that, when once Cassio has become intoxicated, a quarrel is certain to ensue. So he sings his hilarious drinking songs, and keeps calling for more wine, till Cassio has reached first the silly and then the quarrelsome stage of drunkenness. He then maligns Cassio to Montano, and in the ensuing disturbance Cassio wounds Montano. Othello appears on the scene in high indignation at such an unseemly disturbance "in a town of war." He hears a garbled account of what has occurred, and then and there dismisses Cassio from his office of lieutenant. The blow and the disgrace have sobered Cassio, and he wails to Iago that in losing his reputation he has "lost the immortal part of himself, and that which remains is bestial." In terrible remorse, utterly ashamed of himself, he cries: "Drunk? and speak parrot? and squabble? swear? and discourse fustian with one's own shadow?—O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee—devil!" And again, "O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal

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away their brains! That we should with joy, pleasure, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts." "To be now a sensible man, by-and-by a fool, and presently a beast! O strange! Every inordinate cup is unblessed, and the ingredient a devil!"

Was ever a stronger temperance sermon preached than this? This is what Shakespeare thought of the evil of drink, and the warning is all the more intense because the gallant soldier who has thus fallen and been ruined is naturally an honourable and noble man. Cassio has not sought the temptation, but been seduced into it by a semblance of good fellowship, and because he has not had the strength of mind to utter, and persist in, a hearty "No." Every custom which destroyed the weak under the semblance of sociability was in Shakespeare's opinion

"A custom

More honoured in the breach than in the observance,"

as he makes Hamlet say of the boisterous health-drinking of the Danish Court. He would undoubtedly have said from his own experience, as good Father Mathew said: "Through drink I have seen the stars of heaven fall, and the cedars of Lebanon laid low."

3. In "Macbeth" we have the lesson of a soul's destruction inculcated with unparalleled power. When the play opens Macbeth is a successful and

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loyal warrior. The witches hail him as Thane of Cawdor, and as one who shall be "king hereafter." The first prophecy is immediately fulfilled, and the seed of evil ambition is at once implanted in the warrior's mind. The thought that he may become king by murdering the gracious Duncan presents itself to him, and he cries :

" Why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs  
Against the use of nature ? "

The only safety would have been imperiously to reject the execrable temptation, and resolutely to trample it out of his soul. Not so Macbeth ! He tampers and dallies with it. When Duncan appoints his heir Prince of Cumberland, Macbeth is goaded on the career of criminal purpose by regarding this as a stumbling-block in the path of his ambition. The evil suggestion which is gradually rooting itself in his soul springs into full life in the mind of Lady Macbeth. She, at least, is determined that no scruples shall hinder her, but that she will at once "catch the nearest way." Then, as always, the tempting opportunity leaps up face to face with the susceptible disposition. For she has scarcely formed her deadly purpose when the announcement is brought that the king proposes to stay at the castle of Macbeth as his guest. And very soon the temptation sweeps all before it, in spite of the murderer's

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hesitations. Macbeth is ready indeed, "upon the brink and shoal of time," to "jump the life to come." But he is well aware that

" In this case  
We still have judgment *here* ;"

and that

" Even-handed justice  
Commends the ingredients of the poisoned chalice  
To our own lips."

Yet, in spite of these twinges of remorse and spasms of fear, the warrior has so readily suffered the evil thought to become the evil wish and the evil purpose, and to seize him with irresistible dominion, that, goaded on by the stronger determination of his wife, he at last, with open eyes, commits the criminal, irrevocable deed. Surely no concrete warning could more powerfully enforce the lesson "Resist the beginnings of evil," and the truth that "the beginning of sin is as the letting out of water." But further, Shakespeare illustrates the words of Christ, that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts ;" and then—as though the floodgates of sin had been opened wide—the evil thoughts are followed by murders, adulteries, and every form of crime. To what writer has it ever been given to add more awful emphasis to the rule :

" Guard well thy thoughts, for thoughts are heard in heaven."

I have selected but three separate scenes to show

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the mighty intellectual force which Shakespeare wields that he may inculcate the duty of watchfulness and the supreme blessedness of moral integrity. I might have selected multitudes of other scenes no less powerful ; but these will suffice to illustrate how much every earnest reader may gain from the wisdom of one who can only be ranked with Dante and with Milton, among the greatest of the teachers of mankind.





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**I**NOW turn to the lessons taught in Shakespeare's plays as a whole. The meaning of life comes to us mostly in great revealing flashes and intense emotions. Imagine the poorest and commonest of our rude sailor boys, trained from infancy in a home of rough hardship, coarse in manner, it may be ignorant in mind, rude in speech, with nothing grand about him, except his humanity. He steps ashore after long toils on the stormy seas, and lo! as he enters his native village, "heart-shaking news meets him in long-accumulated arrears," and rushing up to the little churchyard the poor lad flings himself in a passion of sobs and tears upon his mother's grave. Is he not, as it were, transfigured by that sorrow? Is not his whole being illuminated at that moment into something of a tragic and poetic grandeur, which shows that "poor humanity" is greater than we know,

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as it struggles in vain with apparently ruthless destiny? Much of all lives, and all of some men's lives, is

"A life of nothings, nothing worth,  
From that first nothing ere our birth,  
To that last nothing under earth."

If this were all we are hardly better than the animals, and might ask with Shakespeare

"What is man?  
If his chief good and market of his time,  
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more."

We must be roused out of this corrupting delusion of earthiness, which Bunyan represents by his Man with the Muck-rake; or else

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The road to dusty death."

Now Shakespeare will help us, as no other secular writer can, to realise the awful reality and solemnity of our existence. There are no shams in his presentment of life as it is—no sickly fetish-worship; no miserable conventions, no namby-pamby make-believes. He does not think that life can be explained by a few rose-pink sentimentalities or saved by a few external scrupulosities. He "holds as 'twere a mirror up to nature." He portrays manhood alike in its grandeur and in its little-

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ness, as now it "bursts of great heart," and now "slips in sensual mire." If we read Shakespeare only as a dramatist who wrote plays to be represented for our amusement on the boards of a theatre, we know nothing of him. "He saw life steadily and saw it whole." As we pass through his plays in chronological order—from the airy, fantastic laughter of "Love's Labour Lost" to the serene and mellow wisdom of the "Tempest"—we can trace how—amid experiences of life often intensely bitter, and through temptations that came with awful force to his vivid temperament—Shakespeare had not only grown year after year in mental stature, but had also learned moral soberness and spiritual wisdom. As Goethe said: "His plays are much more than poems. The reader seems to have before him the books of fate, against which is beating the tempest of eager life, so as to drive the leaves backwards and forwards with violence." And his plays became deeper in awful meaning as his life went on. Sir Walter Raleigh, in some memorable pages of the Preface to his "History of the World," traces the vindication of the moral order, the glory of faithfulness, and the certain Nemesis of evil doing, in the lives of our English kings; but how much more powerfully is this set forth in Shakespeare's historic plays! He illustrates for us with incomparable art and power the sure workings of the law of retribution, not by means of arbitrarily-

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administered reward or punishment, but in the way of the natural consequences and outcome of human deeds. Shakespeare's historic plays do not rise to the incomparable grandeur of some of his later tragedies of passion. Yet no writer has ever surpassed the lessons of moral wisdom at which we may arrive by studying the normal results of good or of evil doing, as he delineates them in the fortunes of King John the hypocritical dastard, and Richard II. the fantastic dreamer, and Richard III. the open villain, and Henry VI. the feeble and unmanly saint, and Henry V. the prosaic but resolute and practical well-doer. This young hero-king evidently attained to Shakespeare's highest ideal of manly and victorious integrity of life as a ruler and as a man.

Into five especially of the plays that belong to the closing epochs of his life Shakespeare has poured his most Titanic conceptions of the evil of the world, and what it means. Those plays are "Hamlet," "Timon of Athens," "Othello," "Macbeth," and "King Lear." Of the lessons of Hamlet, and of the fine curses of Timon, "with his noble heart, which strongly loathing greatly broke," I will not now speak. At the other three plays we will, by way of illustration, cast a passing glance.

i. In "Othello" Shakespeare has given us his most finished picture of a full-blown and irredeemable scoundrel : the only absolute and quite unmitigated incarnation of moral evil whom he has portrayed.

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Iago is a sensual egotist, who, because he disbelieves wholly in goodness and chooses to foster in his own mind a suspicion equally vile and groundless, entraps one after another of the innocent to their ruin, and becomes a very demon of iniquity, doing the devil's authentic work. He has not enough belief even to create remorse in him. Malignity and animalism suffice this human Mephistopheles. Lodovico calls him "a viper and a hellish villain," and he is the only monster entirely without one gleam of a redeeming feature whom Shakespeare has delineated. Othello, disillusioned at last from the envenomed spell, looks at the man who has destroyed him, and says :

"I look down towards his feet ;—but that's a fable :  
If that thou be'st a devil I cannot kill thee."

And again :

"Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil  
Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?"

Iago is a specimen of those "men-slugs and human serpentry" of whom Keats speaks. He feeds on dust, and by the potent alchemy of his own baseness transmutes it into venom. Of course, as befalls all such "human serpentry" in the long run, his own head is crushed. But while all our sympathy and love is for the victims, whose innocence he has plunged into sin, into rashness, and into irretrievable disaster, we can hardly feel one spark of pity for this

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clever, successful, atrocious reprobate when he is tortured and executed amid our uttermost loathing. For Desdemona, for Cassio, for rash, honest Othello, "crushed and beaten to their ruin by this demon's anger stern," we have nothing but heartfelt compassion ; and thus the inherent majesty of goodness asserts itself as the one supreme thing to be sought after, even amid the deadly triumph of wickedness. A writer who so intensely, and by the indirect grandeur of his art, convinces us that, as Milton says,

" If Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her,"

furnishes us with the strongest possible arguments for our inherent belief in God and immortality, and thus teaches us the most solemn and eternal lessons.

ii. Again, Shakespeare's "Macbeth" is the tragedy of "Sin its own avenger." It sets before us in lurid illumination the horrors of a guilty conscience scourging the offender with whips and scorpions, and making the murderer his own executioner. Remorse afflicts the man who is tampering with his first experiences of crime, and "when the pleasure has been tasted and is gone, and nothing is left of the crime but the ruin it has wrought, then, too, the Furies take their seats upon the midnight pillow!" And Shakespeare teaches us this law of the moral world with a force that thrills our deepest hearts. But "Macbeth" is also a study of *temptation*. All sin

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begins in the consent of the evil which is within us to the suggestion which comes from without us. "The tempting opportunity always meets the susceptible disposition." Macbeth's passion to be king, even at the cost of bloody treachery, is stimulated by the juggling prophecy of the three witches. He entertains the evil thought, till it has developed into an overmastering purpose. He is further stimulated to the actual abhorrent crime by the stern determination of his wife, till the two, in spite of the fierce recalcitration of their own alarmed consciences, murder their king and guest, the gracious Duncan. Feeling the awful ghastliness of the crime into which he had thus been led, Macbeth cries :

" Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red."

On the other hand, Lady Macbeth, in contemplation of her husband's shrinking conscience, cries: "A little water clears us of this deed!" But she, too, lives to find, in the agonies of dreaming sleep, that not even all the perfumes of Arabia will sweeten her little hand from the sickening taint of blood which she imagines herself to have washed away at once with a few drops of water.

Thus Macbeth exhibits "that frightful page in the book of human destinies of which the head-line is

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‘Desires Accomplished.’” That page cannot but be a “frightful” one, in spite of any apparent immediate fruition, when the desires are wicked, and when they have been accomplished by deeds of guilt. But in that curse of a criminal desire, criminally fulfilled, we read not only the lesson :

“ I swear 'tis better to be lowly born,  
And range with humble livers in content,  
Than to be perked up in a glistening grief  
And wear a golden sorrow ; ”

but, much more, we have the delineation of crime through all its stages—temptation, glamour, the maturing of the evil wish, the spasm of the guilty act, and the agony of disillusionment, which instantly follows.

“ Had I but died an hour before this chance  
I had lived a blessed time ! ”

But the immediate disillusionment, however agonising, is as nothing ; for on the heels of it come the hauntings of ghostly shame, the permanence of horror, the turning to venomous ashes of the fruit guiltily plucked : last of all, retributive catastrophe, coming down like a thunderclap, puts an end to unutterable despair. Macbeth stands before us a haggard miserable criminal, sick of life, and mockingly betrayed by the powers of evil, in which he has trusted. Unlike Iago, he still believes in the goodness, the forfeiture of which haunts him, and makes



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him feel that, "fruit is seed," and that he is only reaping the harvest of what he himself had sown.

He feels that the heart of the wicked is a troubled sea. Iago, like a fiend, is content to stand out vividly, as long as may be in the glare of the hell which he has deliberately chosen, and which for a time suffices him ; but Macbeth *feels* hell to be hell, and it is in agony that he would have cried with the fallen Archangel of Milton :

" Which way I fly is hell ; myself am hell ;  
And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep  
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,  
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven."

iii. Lastly, let us glance for one moment at the stupendous play of "King Lear"; that tragedy of tragedies ; that tragedy of storm and tempest, which sets before us the earthquake and eclipse, the catastrophe and conflagration of every element of human happiness. A lovelier picture of womanly faith and tenderness than Cordelia, the daughter of King Lear, even Shakespeare never drew. And this pure daughterly love the old foolish king, in his rash autocracy and ungovernable egotism, has flung away. And there lies Cordelia, strangled on the bosom of her sire, and the poor mad, hunted, deserted, dis-crowned king tears his thin white locks and sobs over the murdered corpse in vain. It is only after hurricanes of calamity that he awakes to find, too late, the priceless treasure of a true daughter's tenderness

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which in his folly he has spurned from him for counterfeits so deadly as the foul and lustful selfishness of a Goneril and a Regan. Dr. Johnson was so disappointed with this termination of the play that he would not read it a second time, and approved of the audacity with which a poor poetaster like Nahum Tate altered it for the stage to a happy ending.

Yet the conceptions of Shakespeare were far sublimer and more true to life. He does not stop to console us with the hopes of the life behind the dark curtains of death. In this stupendous picture of human ruin, in which

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,  
They kill us for their sport,"

Shakespeare has deliberately excluded the possibility of any allusion to the heaven beyond the grave which shall, for the innocent, redeem the frightful ruin of this life by the unimaginable bliss of a life to come. For the England of King Lear is supposed to be an England of Pagans who have never heard of Christianity. But had it been otherwise, Shakespeare would only have weakened the intense force of the lesson which he designed to teach, which was that, even if there were *no* life to come, yet—if we were nothing but creatures of a day—"evil is abnormal, and a curse which brings down destruction upon itself." Shakespeare shows us innocence and nobleness overwhelmed with uttermost earthly defeat, but

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he never wavers for one instant in his estimate of right and wrong. He has no little platitudes to offer us ; he does not pretend to account for the mystery of things as though he were " God's spy."

Yet, taking the facts of the world simply and resolutely as they are, in all their unutterable inexplicable pathos, he exalts and purifies us, because, in spite of all the pity and the terror, he still shows us the Immortality of Goodness, and its certain victory, in the midst of apparently irretrievable ruin. Never was there a more tragic figure than that of King Lear. " What a figure !" exclaims Victor Hugo, " what a caryatid ! He is the man bent down, and ever exchanging one burden for another yet more crushing. The more feeble the old man grows, the more the weight augments. He is over-burdened by the load, first of empire, then of ingratitude, then of isolation, then of despair, then of hunger and thirst, then of madness, then of all nature. The clouds still roll over his head, the forests overwhelm him with their shade, the hurricane beats upon his white hair, the rain and the storm drench his mean garments, and he walks along bent and haggard, as though the two knees of the night were on his back." There are times when to all of us, as to King Lear, may come the temptation to think that—

" Life is but a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing."

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But we are prevented from succumbing to such despair, because Shakespeare by his art shows us, as he had himself learnt of God, that even apart from eternal hopes, the right still differs from the wrong, not by mere "preferability," but by an immeasurable difference of divine superiority. Faith and goodness still burn through the midnight, and triumph over it. Even when good true men seem most hopelessly overwhelmed, he bids us see that "over such sacrifices, the gods themselves throw incense." It is the lesson of the Psalmists, of the book of Job, of the noblest chapters in the story of Daniel, of the Epistles, of the Apocalypse, of all Martyrdom, yes, of the very Cross of Christ Himself. The man who is content to live in the smug self-satisfaction of a prosperity acquiescent in earthliness, self-deceived by a sham religion—the selfish worldling who is determined at all costs not to suffer even for righteousness' sake—knows absolutely nothing of the meaning of life. He may complacently circumnavigate the widespread shallows, but he will never obtain the faintest glimpse of any Island of the Blest. Shakespeare shows us that, even were there no Eternity hereafter, it were still better to be Cordelia, strangled in prison, than to enjoy "those deadly egoisms" of Goneril and Regan in their purple, and wearing their adulterous crowns. We would rather lie dead beside sweet Desdemona, or self-stabbed with rash but honest Othello

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than exult and succeed with the thrice-execrable Iago.

We would rather be the gracious Duncan lying there murdered at midnight, his white hair dabbled with his gore, and

“ His silver skin laced with his golden blood,”

than be his haggard and haunted murderer. We would choose to be King Lear, “in his weakness, his unreason, his affliction, his poverty and madness,” rather than Edmund even at the summit of his success with his thought, “active as a virulent acid, eating its rapid way through all the tissues of human sentiment.”

That is one of the consummate lessons which Shakespeare had learnt from the books of God. Faithfulness and innocence are above all earthly reward. Whatever earth may heap upon man of agony, whether his faithfulness palpitates with light or seems to be quenched in darkness, virtue is always its own exceeding great reward. The righteous have set their hearts on other things than riches, or success, or the praise of men. To these they rarely attain. It is their much commoner lot to live “belied in the hubbub of lies,” and die disappointed of every earthly hope. But they do attain, and that always—as the bad, amid their awful retribution, cannot attain—to what is transcendently happier, and infinitely more precious, even to the tranquil and

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never-to-be-shaken conviction that all is and all must be well. Yes! even in the lion's den—yes, even amidst the hottest fires of Smithfield—yes, amid the worst wrenches of the rack of this tough world, they know the glory of spiritual happiness! The peace of God which passeth all understanding is only within the reach of those who, because they are faithful to the best they know, feel that the eternal God is their refuge and underneath them are the everlasting arms. And this is the truth which, in its own way, the great dramatist desires to bring home to our hearts and consciences.

Shakespeare, in his last Will and Testament, wrote, "I commend my soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour, to be made partaker of Life Everlasting"; and I believe that he would have subscribed from his heart to those strong words of Robert Browning, the poet of our own day who was most akin to him in manly genius and sincerity, that

"The acknowledgment of God in Christ,  
Accepted by the reason, solves for thee  
All problems in the world and out of it,  
And has, so far, advanced thee to be wise.

DANTE





## I.—THE INFERNO \*

**D**ANTE, of whose "Divine Comedy" I shall speak in this and the two following papers, was not only great, but one of the greatest of religious teachers. He was great in himself; he has been called "the voice of ten silent centuries." He was so great, and so conscious of his own greatness, that in his "Inferno," he calmly places himself among the six supremest poets known to him of all the ages; and posterity has fully ratified his judgment. What might be set down to insane vanity in smaller men, becomes in the greatest a calm consciousness of heaven-bestowed genius. "The man of great soul," says Aristotle, "is one who counts himself worthy of great things, being worthy." Few have quietly dared to claim this immortality whom time has not justified. Even an Ovid could boast

\* In one or two passages of the paper I quote from a Lecture delivered by me in America.

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that neither the wrath of Jove, nor fire, nor iron, nor devouring time could destroy his poem. Even a Horace could say, "*Exegi monumentum ære perennius.*" Milton determined while yet a youth "to write something which the world would not willingly let die." Bacon, with dignified confidence, entrusted his reputation to future ages. Shakespeare says, even of one of his sonnets,

"Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlast this powerful verse."

And not only was Dante so great in himself, but he deals with the greatest of all subjects. He teaches verities the most awful and the most eternal, at some few of which we may be able to glance. And, once more, his great work, "The Divine Comedy," as it is called, concentrates into itself the essence of many of the most remarkable outcomes of all human literature in all their forms. Like the "Confessions" of St. Augustine and of Rousseau, and like the "Samson Agonistes" of Milton, it is, in part, a scarcely-veiled autobiography. Like Spenser's "Faerie Queene," it is an allegory. Like the "Apocalypse," and like Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," it is a vision. Like Goethe's "Faust," it is a soul's history. Like the "Paradise Lost," it embraces earth and heaven and hell. Like Wordsworth's "Excursion," it is

"A song divine of high and passionate thoughts  
To their own music chanted."

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It contains, like the works of the Roman Satirists, many political elements. Like the *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius, it sums up all the results of the then existing knowledge. Thus it represents the main life-work of one of the greatest of human souls. It is the intensest of beacon-lights kindled by one of the loftiest of human intellects. And these multitudinous elements are all harmoniously fused into one by what Coleridge calls the "esemplastic," the unifying force of a supreme imagination. Hence we may well say of the "Divine Comedy" with Dean Church that it is "one of the landmarks of history. More than a magnificent poem; more than the beginning of a language and the opening of a national literature; more than the inspirer of art and the glory of a great people; it is one of those rare and solemn monuments of the mind's power which measure and test what it can reach to; which rise up ineffaceably, and for ever, as time goes on, marking out its advance by greater divisions than its centuries, and adopted as epochs by the consent of all who come after. They who know it best would wish others also to know the power of that wonderful poem; its austere yet subduing beauty; what force there is in its free and earnest and solemn verse to strengthen, to tranquillise, to console. Its seriousness has put to shame their trifling; its magnanimity, their faint-heartedness; its living energy, their indolence. Its stern and sad grandeur

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has rebuked low thoughts; its thrilling tenderness has overcome sullenness and assuaged distress; its strong faith has quelled despair and soothed perplexity; its vast grasp has imported the sense of harmony to clashing truths." "After holding converse with such grandeur," says Mr. Wicksteed, "our lives can never be so small again."

But if we desire to learn the intense and infinitely important, and uniquely elevating lessons which this great poet can impart to us more powerfully than any human teacher except Shakespeare, we must not only read but study him. He does not care for ignorant, feeble, otiose readers, whose ordinary pabulum is the tenth-rate novel or the society newspaper. He ignores "the shoreless lake of human ditch-water," and "the stagnant gooseponds of village gossip." The seed of his poem was sown in tears, and reaped in misery. For many years, he says, it made him lean with thought. He warns off the frivolous and the foolish, and tells them, truly, that they will be unable to follow his little bark as it speeds fearlessly on its way through the deep waters of Eternity. Like the kindred soul of Milton, he cares only for "fit audience though few."

Two hints may help us to understand the poem.

i. First, as to the name of the poem. Why is it called "The Divine Comedy"? The name "Divine" was not given to it by Dante. It expresses the humble admiration of subsequent ages.

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But he calls it a "comedy" for two reasons: first because it differs from tragedy in having a happy ending; for, beginning in the foul abysses of Hell, it ends in the perfect glory of Paradise. Secondly, it was almost the first poem of the early fourteenth century that was written, not in the learned ecclesiastical Latin, then regarded as the only language which scholars could deign to use, but in the vernacular Italian: and perhaps, thirdly, because Dante meant the ordinary style of it to be simple and familiar, so much so that in the first division he not only stoops to the very humblest similes, but freely admits grotesque and ludicrous elements which now and then descend even to broad humour. One canto of the "Inferno" has even been described as "The Pantomime of Hell."

ii. The second hint I have to give is of supreme importance. It was from their complete failure to understand the meaning of the poem that some men, even men of real eminence, have not only been unable to apprehend its greatness, but have even spoken of it with hatred and contempt. Thus Voltaire, who also regarded Shakespeare as a sort of drunken savage, called it a bizarre poem, a "salmigondis," or hotchpotch. Goethe, with a lack of wisdom and apprehensiveness quite astonishing in so great a man, said that "the 'Inferno' is revolting, the 'Purgatorio' dull, and the 'Paradiso' unreadable." Mr. Walter Savage Landor, in his

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blustering way, calls the "Inferno" (by a stupidly, perverse prejudice) "the most immoral and impious book ever written!" Against these arrogant misjudgments we may set the deliberate opinions of Englishmen like Milton, Shelley, Macaulay, Carlyle, Symonds, and Dean Church; of Frenchmen like De Lamennais and Ozanam; of Italians even like Leopardi and Mazzini. To quote a recent and eminent testimony, Mr. Gladstone wrote: "In the school of Dante I have found the greater part of that mental provision (insufficient as it is) which has carried me to the term of seventy-three years."

Contemptuous opinions running counter to the reverential gratitude felt for "The Divine Comedy," not only by nearly all great thinkers but by all nations, are only a proof of the mental limitation of those who utter them. But such criticism, like masses of other criticism, was only based on a radical misapprehension, and Dante himself corrected it nearly six hundred years ago in his letter to Can Grande, Lord of Verona. He pointed out that his poem was not literal, but allegorical. Man, he says in his prose work on "Monarchy" (iii. 15), "stands midway between the corruptible and the incorruptible. His body is corruptible; his spirit is incorruptible. Hence his destinies also are twofold. God has set before him two ends—the happiness of this life in the earthly Paradise, which may be attained by virtue; and the happiness of life eternal,

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which consists in the fruition of the divine countenance. Human knowledge may help us to attain the first; divine knowledge, by working in us faith, hope, and charity, can alone help us to attain the second, which was revealed by Jesus Christ. Hence, if the subject of the whole work, taken according to the letter, is the state of souls after death—considered not in a special but in a general sense—the subject of the whole work allegorically is man, liable to the rewards or punishments of justice, according as, through the freedom of the will, he is deserving or undeserving." In that sentence lies the only key to the true meaning and the right interpretation of Dante's "Inferno." The three cantos of his poem do not only or mainly mean Hell, Purgatory, Paradise: in the truer and deeper sense they might be called Sin, Repentance, the Beatitude of the purified and forgiven soul.

The chief stumbling-block to the understanding of "The Divine Comedy" has been that, in the "Inferno," readers saw only, as it were, an elaborate description of physical torments. It is nothing of the kind; and Dante never meant it for anything of the kind. He held, indeed, the views of the whole Church in the Middle Ages, which had never even been questioned. He doubtless believed, with all who lived in his day, that the torments of hell were literal ice and literal flames, and that they were eternal in the sense of being endless. And he

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lived in terrible times, far less shrinkingly sensitive than ours, and far more accustomed to the almost daily contemplation of physical horrors and agonies. Dante himself had seen a human being burnt alive, and had himself been sentenced to be burnt alive on a false charge.

It is not strange that such terrible times had terrible beliefs, and in all those beliefs Dante shared. Whatever hell may be, we do not believe that it is like the hell of Dante, a burning slaughter-house, a torture-chamber of endless vivisection and worse than inquisitorial horrors, where souls welter in the crimson ooze of Phlegethon, or move about like Nero-torches of animated flame. Nevertheless, under that dreadful imagery, so weird, lurid, and grosteque, lie truths of eternal import. About the horrors and infamies of a material hell; about the steep ascents of a Purgatory—if such there be; about the glories and employments of the Paradise of God, Dante knew just as much, which is just as little, as ourselves. But that there is a moral hell and a moral heaven; that heaven and hell are tempers, and not only places; that they are states of the soul, and not physical fires or golden cities in the far-off blue, he knew, as all must know who have enough of soul left in them undestroyed by vice and worldliness to apprehend what God is, and to feel what sin means. Is there not many a man of whom, as of Dante, it might be said, "That man has been in



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hell"? Happy the man who, like Dante, has struggled through the abyss where sin is punished, to the mountain where sin is purged, to the Paradise where it is remembered no more. The poem was not written to give mere poetic pleasure, but to teach and to warn. It was intended to describe not merely or chiefly an obscene bodily hell, or a material heaven, but to bring home to us the truth that this world *is* the next, in the light of the eternal Yea and the eternal Now.

Let me point out at once two lessons which every wise and noble soul may learn from the entire poem.

i. One is his sense of the sublime transcendency of goodness—the conviction that good and evil are “the two polar elements of this creation, on which it all turns,” and that they differ “not by preferability of one to the other, but by incompatibility absolute and infinite; that the one is excellent and high as light and heaven, the other hideous, black as Gehenna and the pit of hell.” If we would know how sin and holiness appeared to one of the grandest of human souls, who had the power also to clothe his meaning in the intensest imagery; if we would be lifted from that base condition of conventionality and compromise in which good and evil are not in real and fierce antagonism, but lie flat together, side by side, in immoral acquiescence and infamous neutrality,—then we may learn a lifelong lesson by

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humble study of the "Divine Comedy." It strips evil bare from all its masks and hypocrisies, that we may see it in all its naked ghastliness, and it shows us what is pure and good in the white intensity, the sevenfold perfection, of undivided light.

ii. The other lesson is the awfulness of sin. Dante knows nothing of the prurient talk about art for art's sake, still less of its nudities, which are naked and not ashamed. He reveals to us, in the poem, step by step, his own moral ameliorations. He desires to hold up "before men's awakened and captivated minds the verity of God's moral government. To rouse them to a sense of the mystery of their state; to startle their commonplace notions of sin into an imagination of its variety, its magnitude, and its infinite shapes and degrees; to open their eyes to the beauty of the Christian temper, both as suffering and as consummated; to teach them at once the faithfulness and awful freeness of God's grace; to help the dull and lagging soul to conceive the possibilities, in its own case, of rising, step by step, in joy without an end—of a felicity not unimaginable by man, though of another order from the highest perfection of earth: this is the poet's end." With these hints to help us we shall better understand the force, the variety, the splendour, the stupendous and eternal import of Dante's meaning. And here let me say, in passing, that so far from attempting to exhaust what he has to teach

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us in the "Inferno," I shall only be able to glance at one or two of his most salient lessons.

And first, let us consider the opening scene.

The vision narrated in Dante's "Divine Comedy" is supposed to have happened in the year 1300. Dante was then thirty-five. "In the middle of the journey of our life," so he begins, "I found myself astray in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost. Ah ! how hard a thing it is to tell how wild, and rough, and stubborn this wood was, which, in thinking of it, renews my fear, bitter almost as death." And while he has thus lost his way, and lost Him who is the way, in this erroneous wood of confused aim and sinful wandering—the wood in which most of us, alas ! spend all our lives—he reaches the foot of a hill whose summit was bathed in sunshine. The hill is the high ground, the Delectable Mountain of faith, of holiness, of moral order, of Christian life ; and from the pass that leads to death Dante turns and makes a strenuous effort to climb the hill. But he is instantly hindered by three wild beasts : a bright and bounding leopard, with spotted skin, of which he admires the beauty ; a lion, which approaches him with head erect and furious anger ; and a gaunt she-wolf, that looks full of all cravings in her leanness. Terrified by these wild beasts from the right and uphillward path, he sees a figure approach him, to whom he appeals for help. This figure is the poet Virgil, who, after dwelling on his

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peril, tells him that he must follow him. Now, the poem of Dante is crowded by many meanings, but the only one which I shall touch upon is the moral allegory. Of the beasts that would fain drive Dante back from the sunny hill to the dark wood, the leopard is pleasure; the lion is anger; the wolf is the love of money. "Behold a lion out of the forest shall slay them, a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities." Sensuality, passion, avarice—these have to be conquered before a man can become a true follower of Christ, or climb the mountain of His beatitudes. Virgil is the personification of human wisdom and conscience—the spirit of imagination and poetry—able to witness to duty, its discipline, its hopes, and its vindications, but unable to confer grace. And Virgil tells Dante that, at the bidding of his Beatrice, who becomes henceforth the personification of divine knowledge, he is commissioned to lead him through Hell where sin is punished, and through Purgatory where sins are cleansed. In order to be delivered from the seductions and semblances of life, Dante is to be led to see, with his own eyes, the awful eternal realities. Thus the "Divine Comedy" comprehends all time and all space. It represents the life-history of a human soul, redeemed from sin and error, from lust, and wrath, and Mammon, and restored to the right path by the reason and the grace which enable

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him to see the things that are, and to see them as they are.

The lesson which he thus teaches in the "Inferno" is analogous to what Marlowe meant in the lines spoken by fiends :

"Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed  
To one self place: but where we are is hell ;  
And where hell is there must we ever be ;  
And, to be short, when all the world dissolves,  
And every creature shall be purified,  
All places shall be hell that are not heaven : "

and to the wail of the Evil Spirit in Milton :

"Which way I fly is Hell ; *myself* am Hell ;  
And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep  
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,  
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heaven."

And again,

"What matter where, if I be still the same ? "

Dante's object, then, in the "Inferno," the part of the "Divine Comedy" which has caused most misgivings—is not a cruelly remorseless picture of the future, but a thrillingly true representation of the inmost meaning of the present. He wishes to set before us Sin, as the one deadly curse of the universe, both in its nature and its punishment ; "now thrilling us with fear ; now freezing us with horror ; now making us feel aflame with indignation" : but meaning always to set before us this lesson more than

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any other, that sin *is* hell; that the wilful, willing sinner is in hell; and that, so long as he remains an alien from the love of God, he must say with the Evil Spirit, "Myself am hell." The vulgar conception of punishment is that it is something external to and apart from sin. Dante's conception is that penalty is the same thing as sin; it is only sin viewed at a later stage of its history; it is only "sin taken a little lower down the stream."

The next lesson to which I would point is that which we may learn from the souls which Dante sees in the Ante-hell.

Passing through the awful gate, they find themselves in a stained and starless atmosphere, which resounds with sighs and lamentations, voices deep and hoarse, and the sound of smitten hands. Dante asks who are these wailers, so multitudinous that "he would never have believed that death had undone so many." And Virgil tells him that these are "the souls of those who lived without praise and without blame," mixed with the caitiff choir of lost angels, who were faithful neither to God nor to Satan, but cared only for themselves. Heaven chased forth their ugliness; even hell spurned their selfish pusillanimity. Their blind life is so poor that they envy every other lot. Naked, stung by gnats and wasps like the mean and paltry cares of a narrow selfishness in which they had worried through a life which was always dead, they follow in aimless

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gyrations the flutter of a giddy flag which is the emblem of "what people say," which they had made the mean guide of their useless lives. They are the wretched neutrals; miserables too petty either for praise or blame; poltroons, waverers, trimmers, rascals, louts, loafers, Facing-both-ways; men who drift down the stream of life like dead fish, instead of swimming against it; men of the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin; men utterly stultified and nullified by blank selfish individualism. "They have perished as though they had never been," Eccles. xlv. 9. They are like the woman of whom A. de Musset writes, the book of life dropped from her hands and she had never read it. "Of all unsuccessful men," says Mr. Froude, "in every shape, there is none equal to Bunyan's Mr. Facing-both-ways, the fellow with one eye on heaven and one on earth; who preaches one thing and does another; and from the intensity of his unreality is unable to see or feel the contradiction. He is substantially trying to cheat both God and the devil, and is in reality only cheating himself and his neighbours. This is of all characters upon earth the one of which there is no hope at all—a character in these days alarmingly common, and the abundance of which makes us find even in Rheinecke inexpressible relief." If we think Dante too hard on them, let us remember where St. John puts "the fearful and the unbelieving" in Rev. xxi. 8; and

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what the Angel of the Churches said to the Laodiceans: "I would that thou wert either cold or hot . . . so then because thou art lukewarm (tepid, χλιαρός) and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

No doubt the passage about them shows that Dante "loved well because he hated"; that he was "dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn," as well as "the love of love"; but so was Milton: and Dante does not speak with *more* passionate disdain than Milton does at the end of his "Reformation in England," where, describing a similar class of empty, worthless, narrow-minded, ignorant, and selfish people, he says that "after a shameful end in this life (which God grant them), they shall be thrown down eternally into the deepest and darkest gulf of hell, where, under the spiteful control, the trample and spurn of all the other damned, that in the anguish of their torture, shall have no other ease than to exercise a raving and bestial tyranny over them as their slaves and negroes, they shall remain in that plight for ever, the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot and down-trodden vassals of perdition!"

The lesson is: Do something! Be something! Take your part, not content to be in life like beasts, making the chief purport of life to sleep and feed; or like sheep and goats "that nourish a blind life within the brain."



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When we read the "Divina Commedia," perhaps we may wonder why, in the divisions of the "Inferno," the souls are punished for *one* type of sin, whereas sins are linked together by a fine network of inextricable meshes, and he who devotes himself to one form of sin is certain to fall into many others.

Dante is awfully right here also. It is true that no man is ever contented with a single sin ; yet it is always one sin, and that the favourite one, which destroys souls. "That conquered, all others fall with it ; that victorious, all others follow it. The lust and anger of the flesh do not of necessity or finally destroy ; but when they become the lust and anger of the heart, these," says Mr. Ruskin, "are the furies of Phlegethon, wholly ruinous. Lord of these, on the shattered rocks, lies couched the infamy of Crete. For when the heart as well as the flesh desires what it should not, and the heart as well as the flesh kindles to its wrath, the whole man is corrupted, and his heart's blood is fed in its veins from the lake of fire."

Again, in all the forms which he invents for the imaginary physical punishments of sin, Dante is pointing the lesson of like to like—the lesson that sin *is* punishment. "Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished." If the unchaste souls are swept round and round by a whirling storm, what is that storm but the unbridled passions of "those that lawless and incertain

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thoughts imagine, howling"? If yet worse carnal offenders are scorched by flakes of fire, falling noiselessly upon them like an incessant snow, are not the desires of a corrupted heart thick with such slow-heating flames? If his gluttons lie prostrate in the sludge, tormented by the dog-demon Cerberus, who is a sort of personified Belly, what are gluttony, and the dehumanising debasement of drunkenness, but the curse "on thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life"? If his hypocrites look like the monks of Cologne, with their huge hoods, which display from afar their dazzling falsity, what is hypocrisy but such a crushing cloak of gilded lead? If his misers are plunged in a lake of boiling pitch, what is that filthy lake, which over-flows its banks, but the symbol of greed for money basely gained, selfishly spent, sordidly amassed—money which sticks to the fingers, and defiles the soul, and causes it to bubble up and down with excitement and depression, and the sighing of souls which it cannot satisfy? What is the frozen pool of Cocytus but the heart benumbed with cruel, cold-hearted, and treacherous selfishness? Are there no living men who, in the very truth of things are not more doomed to such places hereafter than they are in them now? Are not such places, in the light of the eternal verity, their own place? Is vice dead? Has it ceased to be grotesque and vile? Are there no living men—usurers, seducers, traitors,

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liars, slanderers—in high places and in low, whom a moralist as brave as Dante would, even in this day, doom to such retributions? Are any of us living in such places? Are our hands foul with that sticky pitch of greed? Are any of our tongues tipped with that envenomed fire? Have our hearts in them no sluice of hatred from the crimson ooze of Phlegethon? If so, let us learn from Dante that sin is no subject for jest and euphemism, no soft infirmity of the blood, but a rebellion against the Lord of our life. And if so, let us look to it, for evil is before us, and take to heart the words of the Lord Jesus, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

In the fifth circle, or the Hell of Incontinence, we meet those who suffer vengeance for the opposite extremes of wrath and gloomy sluggishness, of which the golden mean is just anger and righteous indignation. The wrathful are constantly rending each other to pieces in the filthy mud of Styx, the river of Hate; the gloomy are submerged wholly in its putrescent slime. These "gloomy-sluggish" are called in Italian *accidiosi*; and Accidia (the Greek ἀκηδία, the Latin *pigritia*, *desidia*) was once counted as the eighth Deadly Sin. It is sloth; sullen irritation; sullen brooding over slight or fancied grievances; lack of noble anger; the weary sadness, "which neither men delight nor women either."

It is the express opposite of that virtuous energy

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which, as Aristotle says, "makes a man 'blessed,' if not 'prosperous.'" We shall better estimate its sinfulness if we remember that "exultation" and "simplicity" were the distinctive characteristics of early Christianity. "The Shepherd" of Hermas—the "Pilgrim's Progress" of the second century—will show what the early Christians thought of such faithless and neglectful gloom. "Unto God shall they all live," says Hermas, "who have cast out sadness from themselves, and arrayed themselves with all joy. Put sadness away from thee; for truly sadness is the sister of half-heartedness and bitterness. He that is sad doth always wickedly; first, because he maketh sad the Holy Spirit, which has been given to man for joy; and next, because he worketh lawlessness, neither praying to God, nor giving Him thanks. Therefore cleanse thyself from this wicked sadness, and thou shalt live unto God."

Is not this, then, a tremendous lesson against sluggish and selfish gloom in lives which ought to be bright with energy, and illumined even amid the darkness by faith in God? And have we noticed that St. Jude, in his Epistle, puts "murmurers" and "complainers" in the forefront of those against whom he hurls his terrible invective?

Again, consider Dante's views of the nature and results of repentance. They may best be seen in the two stories of a father and a son, Guido and

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Buonconte da Montefeltro. In the eighth circle of the Malebolge or "Evil-pits," he sees, swathed in a tongue of flame, Guido, who tells him that, after the life of a warrior, he thought to make amends by putting on the cord-girdle of a Franciscan, like those deluded hypocrites who, in the "Paradise Lost,"

"Dying put on the weeds of Dominic,  
Or in Franciscan think to pass disguised."

But while he is in his monastery, the Pope Boniface VIII. comes to him and promises him full absolution for whatever counsel he may give if he will only tell the Pope how to capture Penestrina. Relying on the Papal absolution, Guido tells the Pope that he may take the city by "long promises and small performance." Shortly afterwards he dies, and St. Francis comes to claim his monk. But at the same moment appears one of the "Black Cherubim," and says, "Wrong me not! he must come down among my menials. Ever since he gave that fraudulent counsel I have had him by the hair. For a man who does not repent cannot be absolved; and it is not possible to repent beforehand of a sin you mean to commit." "O wretched me!" exclaims Guido; "how I started when this devil seized me and said, 'Perhaps thou didst not think that I was a logician'!"

Now, in the "Purgatory" we meet Guido's son

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Buonconte, who had been killed in 1289 at the battle of Campaldino. He, too, like his father, had lived a careless and evil life, but in flying from the rout, wounded in the throat, he fell in a pool of his own blood amid the reeds and mire of a marsh. But his last cry was a cry for pardon; and it was heard.

An angel of God came to take his soul at the same moment as a fiend of hell. But all that the fiend could say was, "O thou from heaven, why dost thou rob me? Thou art carrying off his eternal part because of one wretched little tear—*per una lagrimetta*—that redeems him from me." If any think that "one wretched little tear" is a small price to pay for the difference between an eternity of blessedness and an eternity of anguish, we must remember that, in Dante's days, there was not believed to be the faintest gleam of any hope beyond the grave for those who died impenitent; but also, that our souls have to do not with a relentless demon, but with a God of love; and that

"He who by penitence is not appeased,  
Is not of earth or heaven."

But further than this, we must bear in mind that repentance, being a process within the soul, cannot be measured by the petty sequences of time. It belongs to that sphere of existence which may easily compress eternity into an hour, or stretch an hour

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into eternity. And Buonconte's story reminds us of that old English one of a careless liver, who, having been killed by a fall from his horse, reappeared to his friends to say :

" Between the saddle and the ground  
I mercy sought, and mercy found."

Next, I would ask you to consider the awful and almost lurid light which Dante has flung on his own meaning in the thirty-third canto. There, in the lowest circle, frozen in the icy pool, the poets see a lost spirit, who entreats them to remove from his eyes the dreadful glassy congealment which, while permitting sight, increases torment by rendering tears impossible. Dante asks who he is, and finds that he is the Friar Alberigo, who, with horrible treachery, has murdered his own guests at a banquet. But Dante knows that Alberigo is alive, and asks with surprise how he comes to be here ? He receives the fearful answer, that when souls have committed crimes so deadly as his, they instantly fall rushing down to that lowest pit, leaving their bodies upon earth. From that moment they are really dead. Their body, indeed, unknown to them, eats, drinks, sleeps, seems to live on earth. But their soul is not in it ; it is but a mask of clay which a demon animates. And he proceeds to mention others whom Dante has seen in hell, who still *seem* to be alive on earth, having a name to live though

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they are dead—being the most awful kind of ghosts, not souls without bodies, but bodies without souls. Is not the world full of such ghosts—of those who “have a name to live while they are dead”; of men and women who, living in pleasure, are “dead while they live”—not disembodied souls, but disensouled bodies, flitting about their living tombs of selfishness and vice? The fourteenth century, we see, had not yet learned to legitimise vice by complacent doctrines. To Dante sin was not a thing to make a mock at. His Cerberus, and his horned demons, and his red-hot cities, and his boiling blood of Phlegethon, and his snow of scorching flames, are but the shadow and reflex of men’s vices, crimes, and sins. And the doom of Friar Alberigo is a literal rendering of the verse, “They shall descend alive (‘go down quick’) into the pit”; and “Thou, O God, shalt cast them into the pit of destruction,” and that “before they have lived out half their days.”

Even these rapid views of some few of Dante’s intended lessons in the first division of his poem will show us that it was the poet’s object, in this mighty work, to set forth certain eternal truths for the purpose of the loftiest, most intense, and most vivid moral guidance. Only through realising those truths, by the help of the grace of God, can we attain to that ideal of character which the poet had set before him : the lovely and lofty moral ideal of



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one who, in boyhood, is gentle, obedient, modest ; in youth, temperate, resolute, and loyal ; in ripe years, prudent, just, and generous ; and who in age has attained to calm wisdom and perfect peace with God.



## —THE PURGATORIO

PURGATORY is described by Dante as "the place where the human soul is cleansed, and becomes worthy to ascend to heaven." It is the antipodes of Hell and the vestibule of Paradise. It represents the heart's restoration to sanity, as contrasted with the horrors and agonies of wilful and willing sin. In Purgatory we are

"saluted by the air  
Of meek repentance, wafting wallflower scents  
From out the crumbling ruins of fallen pride ;"

and all the spirits in it are *contenti nel fuoco*—happy even in the midst of the burning fiery furnace, because they are

"tending all  
To the same point, attainable by all :  
Peace in ourselves and union with our God."

We here bid farewell to the "hopeless terror" of the "Inferno" ; its audacities ; its grotesque brutal-

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ities ; its indecent fiends ; its stench and sludge, and Stygian marshes and crimson rivers, and tettering leprosies, and cruelly congealing ice ; and we watch the souls submitted to the moral agencies which are remedies for sin. The poem is intensely human in its interest, and full of the hope and joy, transcending anguish, of those who can cry, "When I awake, I am present with Thee."

The chief consequences of grave wrong-doing are three: (1) the debt of just penalty; (2) the evil inclination of the will; and (3) the perverted instincts of the body and of the mind. The poem, in its whole inner meaning, does not bear only on penalties after death, but on the means whereby good habits may be substituted for evil habits in this life. Purgatorial pain is necessary for the satisfaction of the debt; for the rectification of the will; and for the strengthening of the misdirected bodily and mental powers, by which even the penitents are still tempted to do what they hate.

Purgatory, then, is "a penitentiary with seven hospitals" for every soul whose sins are capable of cure. It is less a place of punishment than of perfectionment, intended to cleanse, to re-beautify, to disinfect the guilty heart. The three lowest terraces are devoted to the purification of the three passions of the mind, Envy, Pride, Wrath, which are the most deadly of all and which lead to all other sin. The middle terrace furnishes the punishment for

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*Accidia*, the moral sloth and spiritual torpor which result from the first three sins and lead to the next three. The last three terraces are for the punishment and cure of the least deadly and destroying of the seven deadly sins—the sensual and earthly, as distinct from the demonic sins, Avarice, Gluttony, and Uncleaness. The first three sins, pride, envy, anger, are the opposite of love; the midmost sin, torpor, is the absence of love; the last three sins, avarice, gluttony, sensuality, are the excess of perverted love. And, as we shall see, there are on each of these terraces of Purgatory, (1) the analogous, inevitable, retributive, self-inflicted punishment; (2) the *sferze*, or goads and incentives supplied by good examples, and the *freni*, or curbs supplied by bad examples; (3) the appropriate prayer; and (4) the beautiful, liberating, attendant angel.\*

The “Purgatorio” abounds in thrilling incidents, and in lessons full of the noblest moral instruction and the deepest spiritual wisdom. As it is, I must be content to give a general sketch of the poem as a whole.

I. No sooner had Dante and Virgil struggled out of the abyss where impenitent sin is punished, to the foot of the mountain where sin is purged, than the whole atmosphere of the poem changes. We have left beneath our feet, utterly and for ever, the horror

\* See all this more fully worked out in the last Italian treatise on the “Purgatorio,” “Perez, I Sette Cerchi del Purgatorio.”

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and the infamy, the silent burning tombs, the brutal indecent fiends; the noisome gloom, where the spirits rage in their Stygian marsh; the river of boiling blood; the pool of agonising frost; the dolorous and harpy-haunted wood of the suicides; the stifling mephitic region of the Furies and of Medusa, where even an Angel's love seems changed into anger and disdainfulness, and where no lip ventures so much as to utter the Redeemer's name. No sooner have they reached the upper light than "the sweet hue of the Eastern sapphire, deepened to the far horizon in the pure serenity of air," bathes the aching vision and gladdens the disgusted heart. Overhead shine the four stars of the four cardinal virtues—Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude—and the Easter Day of the year of Jubilee begins to dawn.

They have reached the Ante-Purgatory, and Cato, the stern guardian of the place, the type of Stoic virtue and self-discipline, bids Virgil go and gird Dante with a smooth rush—for in the "Inferno" he has dropped his monastic girdle into the abyss of fraud—and to bathe his face, all stained by the mirk of the abyss, which it is not fit for angels to look upon. The mountain island of Purgatory is placed in the western hemisphere of water; and on its marge nothing grows but rushes, because they alone can live in the beating of the restless surge. The poets hasten towards the shore; and, in a shady place, whence first they catch sight of the tremulous

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shimmer of the sea, Virgil places his hands on the ground, and bathes in dew the tear-stained cheeks which Dante offers him, discoloured as they are by the foul air of hell. "The dew of thy birth is of the womb of the morning." Then he plucks a smooth rush, and girds him with it, and where he plucked up the humble plant another is instantly reborn. Rushes, and no other plant, will grow on the oozy shore, because they are the emblem of humility. St. Peter says, "Tie humility around you like a slave's apron;" and Dante before he can climb the mountain of cleansing must be girded with humility, the virtue which he needed most. Rushes bend to the beating wave, and so are not broken, just as the wearied soul, when it meekly submits to God's chastisements, finds them to be for healing. And when the rush is plucked, another springs up in its place because the means of grace are not wasted in the using. The lesson is for all time, and for life as well as for death. He who would enter the realm of Penitence must be girded with meekness, and his face must be washed in the pure dew of heaven, gathered in the shady places of godly sorrow.

2. Then, over the sea, in the morning dawn, a gleam approaches them, swift as the flight of birds, and ever growing brighter, till they recognise the white wings of an angel, as he stands high on the stern of a light shallop. He needs neither oar nor

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sail, but the boat speeds forward by the waving of his eternal plumes, and in it are more than a hundred spirits, singing the psalm "When Israel came out of Egypt." The angel, whose look seems inscribed with happiness, blesses the spirits with the sign of the cross as they leap ashore, and then speeds swiftly away. Dante recognises one of the newly-arrived souls as his friend the musician Casella, and at his request Casella sings Dante's song "O love which dost hold converse in my mind." He sings with such sweetness that all the spirits stop to listen, till the guardian of the place scatters them as a flock of feeding doves are scattered, by sternly bidding them remember that there must be no slothful loitering till they have cast off the coverings which veil their souls from God. It is one of the many reminders which we receive throughout the "Purgatorio" that not even innocent things must keep us back from the steep path through penitence to heaven. Speeding on, they are directed by some spirits to an aperture through which they must climb. It is so small and mean-looking, that Dante has often seen a vine-dresser fill up a larger gap with a forkful of briars when the grapes begin to purple. Passing that strait entrance, they find the climb up the craggy mountain-side so steep that to Dante it seems more rugged than the steepest passes of the Apennines which had become familiar to his exiled feet. But here a man needs not only the



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hands and feet of effort, he must fly—fly on the swift wings and plumes of burning desire, guided by faith and illuminating hope; though, even then, he will also need all the toil of heart, and knees, and hands, to scale those toppling craggs. And sometimes Dante cries to Virgil almost in despair, but he is told that he must not fall back till they reach a resting-place. And when he is discouraged by the thought that the summit of the mountain rises far out of sight, yet (for repentance grows ever easier by effort) Virgil tells him that the higher men climb, the less does the ascent hurt them, till at last it becomes not easy alone but pleasant and spontaneous.

3. When the poets reach a resting-place they learn that they are in the Ante-Purgatory, for as there is an Ante-Hell for the souls of the sluggishly selfish, so there is an Ante-Purgatory for the souls of those who have not repented till the hour of death, but have even then found the great arms of the infinite goodness spread wide open to receive them. These souls chant the "Miserere" as they go, and among these Dante converses with the excommunicated King Manfred of Naples, and with Buonconte of Montefeltro. But meanwhile they must pause. The night is coming on. "No upward step can ever be taken after the sun sets. The night cometh when no man can work." The Ante-Purgatory, like the Ante-Hell, is crowded with spirits; for are not

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selfishness and worldly aims all but universal among mankind? and, even if our souls have grace to struggle an inch or two above these, are we not all tempted to moral indolence and spiritual sloth?

4. But since the twilight is falling, they are led by the spirit of the poet-patriot Sordello to a lovely dell, enamelled with flowers of all hues, and balmy with fragrance indescribable, where they see the spirits of many of the noble dead. Among them we are pleased to find our own King Henry III., "the king of simple life," the builder of Westminster Abbey. These spirits, through the cares of sovereignty, have been too tardy in repentance. Under the light of three stars—the stars of the three theological virtues—Faith, and Hope, and Charity—they are singing the old mediæval compline hymn:

"Te lucis ante terminum  
Rerum Creator poscimus  
Ut pro tua clementia  
Sis praesul et custodia."

"Thee, ere the closing of the day,  
Creator of the world, we pray,  
We pray Thee of Thy clemency  
Our guardian and our Lord to be."

Two angels, armed with swords which are of flame but short and with no points, descend and stand on the hill on either side. Green were their plumes as the freshborn leaflets of spring, and green—the radiant colour of Hope—were the robes fluttered by

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the beating of their wings; and their fair golden heads were visible, though their faces dazzled the sight. And when down the unguarded end of the valley, a huge serpent—the one which gave Eve that bitter food—comes creeping through the grass and flowers, slily and self-complacently turning its head, and ever shaking its glittering scales—down swept from the opposite heights those two heavenly falcons; and hearing their green wings cleave the air, the serpent fled, and the angels wheeled upward to resume their guard. Exquisite allegory! The dell, all flowers and fragrance, represents the resting-place of the soul which has felt the stirrings of repentance and the certain hope of forgiveness. The starry lights of virtue shine upon it; it breathes of celestial song and gladness. The temptations of sin, sleek and subtle and glozing, ever creeping serpent-like to surprise its denizens; but the Angels of Hope keep watch over it, the hue of whose robes and radiant wings is that of the rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. It is the Land of Beulah in the "Pilgrim's Progress"; but the poet implies the deeply necessary caution, that the soul, even when it has repented, has still need to watch and pray.

5. Then follows an allegory no less clear and beautiful. The poets reach a gate, which looks like a mere crack or cleft in the wall, approached by three steps. The first is of white marble, so smooth

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and polished that it reflects the exact appearance of him who gazes on it. The second is of dark inky-purple, rugged and burnt, and cracked lengthwise and across. The third, which masses itself above, is of porphyry, flaming as the blood which leaps from an artery. On the threshold of diamond, upon this step, sits an angel clad in ashen-coloured garments, who holds a key of silver and of gold. Learning that they have come thither by the grace of Heaven, the angel raises Dante, who has smitten on his breast and fallen prostrate at his feet, and with the point of his sword marks the letter P seven times upon his forehead. "See," he said, "that when thou art within, thou wash off these strokes." Then, telling them that for those who lie prostrate there he is bidden to lean to mercy rather than to justice, he pushes open the sacred door, warning them that he who looks back must at once return, as not being worthy of the kingdom of heaven. The narrow cleft in the rock is the door—the needle's eye—of penitence, which, when seen from afar, seems much narrower than when a man has really faced it. It can only be approached by the white step of Sincerity, which mirrors, as he is, the man who stands on it; the dark, rough, cross-splintered step of Contrition; the flaming porphyry step of Self-devotion, of love to God and man. Only by candour, by sorrow, by love can the sinner set his feet on the diamond threshold of his Redeemer's merits; and to

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such alone can the Angel of Absolution, in his sad-coloured robe, with his golden key of Authority and his silver key of holy Discernment, open that steep path, where he who hath once put his hand to the plough must not look back again. The seven Ps on the forehead are the *Peccata*, the seven deadly sins, of which every mark must be effaced from any brow which can ever be uplifted to the light of God.

6. They have now passed out of the Ante-Purgatory, and reached the lowest of the seven terraces, which, connected with each other by flights of steps, run round the Mountain of Purgatory proper. Each terrace is devoted to the punishment of one of the deadly sins. But since all sins are inextricably linked together, every soul must pass through all the seven remedial penalties.

i. The lowest terrace, where the sin of pride is punished, and where they hear the spirits singing "We praise thee, O God," is of white marble, exquisitely carved with sculptures representing scenes of pride by way of warning, and of humility by way of encouragement. Dante realised the sacredness of teaching by means of Art. The spirits which there undergo the blessedness of healing punishment are bowed to the earth with weights, under which—now retributively humbled—they crawl stooping along, reminding Dante of the corbels in a Gothic building, which have the knees bent painfully to the breast. As they go along they chant the Lord's Prayer, only

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saying that the clause "Lead us not into temptation" is for their brethren upon earth, since they themselves, through the grace of God, can have no temptation more.

At the end of the terrace is an Angel. He is a fair creature, clad in white, and in his face a quivering gleam as of the morning star. Opening his arms and wings, he bids them ascend, and with one brush of his heavenly plumes upon Dante's forehead erases the first of the seven Ps. Then, finding his weight indefinitely lightened by that remission of pride, to the sound of the chant "Blessed are the poor in spirit" Dante mounts to the second terrace.

ii. It is of dull-coloured rock, of the livid hue of their besetting sin, and there, with their eyelids sewn together by an iron wire, blinded as once they had been self-blinded by vice, leaning their backs upon the rock, and clad in teasing cloth of hair, the spirits once sinful, but now sure of ultimate forgiveness, rue the evil eye, the dulness and the irritability of the mortal sin of envy. These helpless, squalid, self-blinded souls, with whom what once was inward has become outward, know now that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Voices in the air recall to them the examples of the sin and of its punishment. A splendid Angel shows Dante and Virgil the next stair, and to the song "Blessed are the merciful" they climb to the third terrace.

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iii. There in a dense, bitter, blinding fog—so dense that Dante can only move through it by leaning on Virgil's shoulder—is punished the sin of anger, where the spirits, their eyes dim because of sorrow, are singing the *Agnus Dei*, and where Dante sees a warning vision of wrath and of its punishment. Then the Angel of Peace, singing "Blessed are the peacemakers," gleams through the smoke, and obliterates the third P from Dante's brow.

iv. In the fourth terrace, hurrying round and round in incessant haste, while they warn each other of the blessing of promptitude and the sin of neglect, the souls of men who have done the work of God negligently expiate the sin of sloth—that spiritual torpor which casteth into a deep sleep. Here, before he reaches the three last terraces where worldly and carnal sins are punished, Dante has a dream of the bewitching siren of sensual temptation shown in her true loathliness by the grace of heaven. Then an Angel with swan-like wings brushes off another of the fatal letters, sweetly singing to them "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

v. In the fifth circle the spirits of the avaricious, who have been "breast-buried in the rubbish of the world," lie prostrate, weeping on the earth; and here the soul of Pope Hadrian V. tells Dante that he had sinned by avarice till he became Pope of



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Rome. Crushed by that burden, and discovering at last the full misery and vanity of life, he had repented. Soon after they hear a sudden outburst of "Glory to God in the highest," and feel the whole mountain tremble. They learn that this always happens from the sympathy of every one of these forgiven souls, when any one of them, ending his expiation, is suffered to mount upwards to Paradise. For when the will which accepts punishments culminates in the will which seeks freedom, God says of the soul, "Loose him, and let him go." They are told that this tremor of joy is for the soul of the poet Statius.

vi. In the sixth circle the gluttonous and drunkards are punished by emaciation, with perpetual thirst and hunger. As they reach its end, an Angel, glorious as metal in the furnace, obliterates the last but one of the seven fatal Ps by touching Dante on the forehead with plumes which breathe ambrosial fragrance like the May breeze blown over grass and flowers at dawn, and sated with innumerable roses.

vii. In the seventh and last circle sensual sinners expiate their carnal wickedness in burning flame. They walk, as it were, in the light of their own fire, and in the sparks which they have kindled. Outside the flame stands an Angel, singing in voice sweeter than mortal "Blessed are the pure in heart"; and he tells Dante that he, and that every soul



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which would enter heaven, must pass through that purifying flame. For "if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer less; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." The mandate strikes into the soul of Dante a deathlike horror. He remembers that he has seen the horrid spectacle of human beings burnt alive; and scarcely by assuring him that the torment cannot end in death, and that, beyond, he will see the glorified form of Beatrice, does Virgil persuade his tardy conscience to plunge into the willing agony. It must be so, for God is like a refiner's fire, and "when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned." He enters the healing flame, guided by a sweet voice which sang "Come, ye blessed of my Father"; but "when I was within," said Dante, "I would have flung myself into boiling glass to cool me, so immeasurable was the burning there."

7. But he passed through it safely, and now man's spirit is near the end of its long course of painful penitence. The soul of Dante, in holy longing, feels as if it were winged for flight. They are on an odorous soil, under the leaves of a forest resonant with the song of birds, and tremulous with a soft breeze which plays upon their foreheads. Through the wood, amid may-blossoms, flows a stream of purest crystal; and, on the other side of it, singing and gathering flowers, is a lovely lady, Matilda, type of the active life which delights in the works of God.

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Already Virgil has said to Dante that he can guide him no farther. "The temporal fire and the eternal hast thou seen, my son, and hast come to a part where I myself can discern no farther. Thou hast come forth from the steep and narrow ways: henceforth take thine own will for thy guide. See there the sun which gleams upon thy brow; see the tender grass, the flowers, and the shrubs which the soil of this land produces of itself. Free, true, and sound is now thy judgment. Expect no further word and sign from me. Therefore, over thyself I crown and I mitre thee." The stream on whose bank they stand is called Lethe, and at another part Eunoë. Innocence and virtue become the restored heritage of the new and childlike man. The water of Lethe chases from the mind the memory of sin; the water of Eunoë recalls every good deed to mind. When Matilda has told them this she sings as in rapture "Blessed are they whose sins are covered." A gleam flashes through the forest; a sweet melody runs through the glorious air, and they see a resplendent vision of the symbols of Christ and the Church, and the Elders and Apostles, and among them, amid a cloud of flowers shed by the hands of Angels, a Lady whose white veil is crowned with olive. The blood of Dante thrills as he recognises Beatrice, now the personification of heavenly wisdom, but at the same time the sweet Lady of his love. He turns for sympathy to Virgil, but Virgil has vanished.

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In those regions human knowledge can help no more. And as he begins to weep that he has lost his guide and friend, Beatrice says to him, "Dante, weep not yet that Virgil leaves thee; weep not yet, for thou must weep soon another wound;" and then, towering over him in imperious attitude, like a mother over a son that is in fault, she asks him how he could have dared to approach this mountain—he who has fallen from his boyish purity and innocence into intellectual aberrations, if not into carnal sin and folly? So sternly does she speak to him as his head is bowed in shame, that the Angels suddenly begin the plaintive strain, "In thee, O Lord, has been my hope," as though indirectly they were pleading for him with the beautiful stern monitress. At their tenderness his heart, which had been benumbed with anguish, breaks like melting ice into sighs and tears.

Broken down with utter remorse and agony at the continued strain of her lofty reproaches, standing like a boy ashamed of guilt, mutely listening, with his eyes upon the ground, and at last bidden to raise his face, he falls down in a swoon. Then Matilda plunges him in the water of forgetfulness; he hears the angels sing "Thou shalt wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." The four virtues, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, receive him. He is bidden to gaze on Beatrice, and sees the light of Christ reflected in her eyes. Then he is suffered

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to drink the water of Eunoë, which is sweeter than words can tell ; and, refreshed like young plants which are reclad by spring with tender leaves, he issues from the holy wave, pure and ready to mount up to the stars.

8. Such is, in outline, this noble poem, which in all its elements—many of which I necessarily omit—is one of the very noblest ever written. Let me touch in conclusion on one or two of its most instructive features.

i. Notice, first, the intense importance which the souls in Purgatory attach to the prayer of their relatives on earth. "Pray for me," all the spirits ask. "Tell my Giovanna, my innocent little daughter Giovanna, to pray for me," says Nino. "Reveal to my sweet Costanza that thou hast seen me here," says King Manfred, "for the prayers of the other world avail much here." "The tears of my Nella—my little Nella, whom I love so much, have brought me here so soon," says Forese. "Neither my wife Giovanna nor any one else cares for me, wherefore I go among the rest with downcast looks," says Buonconte of Montefeltro. But some will say—and rightly—that Scripture gives no sanction to prayers for the dead. But we must remember, in reading Dante, that we are not only reading of Hell and Purgatory and Heaven hereafter, but also of Vice, Repentance, Holiness now. And can anything help us more in the contrition of a penitential

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life than to feel our solidarity with the communion of saints, and to know that intensity of love prevails against length of time, and that we can be helped by the prayers of those who love us? The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. "And thou," says King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,

"If thou should never see my face again,  
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

ii. Another great lesson the "Purgatorio" will teach us. It is that forgiveness of sins is a very different thing from remission of consequences. Esau repents, but he has lost the blessing; Achan repents, but he has to die by fire in the Valley of Achor; David repents, but thenceforth the dark spirits of lust and blood are walking in his house. The impure man repents, but his bones are still full of the sin of his youth which shall lie down with him in the dust. The prodigal repents, but nevertheless his root has been as rottenness, and his blossom has gone up as dust. The "Purgatory" will help to teach us that sin is worse than punishment.

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"Yea, thou forgivest, but with all forgiving  
Canst not restore mine innocence again,  
Make Thou, O Christ, a dying of my living—  
Save from the guilt, but never from the pain!"

iii. The spirits in Purgatory yearn for the presence of God, but do not desire their penalty to be shortened. The sense of shame, the sense of justice, prevail with them. When Dante speaks to those in the seventh circle they lean towards him, but are careful not to lean one inch beyond the fire, though molten glass would be cool to it, because they do not desire one moment's respite from the pain which is purging away their sin. When the poet Guido has ended his conversation with Dante he vanishes in the flames as a fish darts to the bottom of the water. There is a deep lesson here. It is the lesson that—

"Hearts which verily repent  
Are burdened with impunity,  
And comforted by chastisement;  
That punishment's the best to bear  
Which follows soonest on the sin,  
And guilt's a game where losers fare  
Better than those who seem to win."

iv. Once more, there is the lesson how pressing is repentance. Men delay repentance; and yet for the soul that has fallen into sin repentance is the very work of life. With awful folly they pave hell with good resolutions which they do not fulfil, and bid God await their leisure. How different is it when a

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soul has realised the awful importance of time ! In Dante's "Purgatorio" the one thought, the one aim, the one desire of the spirits is with all speed to get rid of the sin which has been the shame and curse of life. The spirits on the terrace of sloth will not stop, even for a moment, in their race. Pope Adrian, weeping for his avarice, bids Dante leave him that his tears may not be interrupted. They are all free ; but their will to suffer proves their worthiness ; for, by the ordinance of Heaven, they are as eager for the healing torment as once they were for the sin. When a soul is in earnest, it has no time to waste on anything which does not further its own duty and its own redemption.

v. Here, then, are a very few of the many lessons of the poem in which Dante draws the picture of men suffering, in calm and holy hope, the sharp discipline of repentance, amid the prayers, the melodies, the consoling thoughts and images, the holy songs, the radiant comforting Angels of the Christian life. It was one and the same man who arose from the despair, the agony, the vivid and vulgar horrors of the "Inferno," to the sense and imaginations of certainty, sinlessness, and joy ineffable.

"No man," says Dean Church, "ever measured the greatness of man in all its forms with so true and yet so admiring an eye, and with such glowing hope, as he who has also portrayed so awfully man's

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littleness and vileness. He never lets go the recollection that human life, if it grovels at one end in corruption and sin, and has to struggle through the sweat and dust and disfigurement of earthly toil, has, throughout, compensations, remedies, spheres innumerable of profitable activity, sources inexhaustible of delight and consolation; and, at the other end, a perfection which cannot be named. And he went farther. No one who could understand and do homage to greatness in man ever drew the line so strongly between greatness and goodness, and so unhesitatingly placed the hero of this world only—placed him in all his magnificence and honoured with no timid or dissembling reverence—at the distance of worlds below the place of the lowest saint."



### III.—THE PARADISO

THE "Paradiso" never has been, or can be, so popular with the mass of readers as the "Inferno" or the "Purgatorio." It has not the weird and thrilling interest and variety of the "Inferno," with its multitudes of contemporary references. It has not the human nearness of the "Purgatorio." What sin is we all know; what penitence is we all know, or may know; what is the unbroken beatitude of glorified spirits we can only dream. It is quite natural to exclaim :

"O for a deeper insight into Heaven !  
More knowledge of the glory, and the joy,  
Which there unto the happy souls is given ;  
Their service, their engagements, their employ :  
For it is past belief that Christ hath died  
Only that we eternal psalms may sing :  
That all the gain Death's awful curtains hide  
Is this eternity of antheming ;  
And this praised rest—shall there be no endeavour ?  
No noble toil, no blessed strife for ever ? "

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In Dante's "Paradiso" no possibility seems left for earthly analogies except such as are derived from the two least carnal senses—those of sight and hearing. Hence the Paradisiacal sources of joy are all derived either from Light or from Melody. Of both these sources of delight there was an abundance in the "Purgatorio," though in the "Inferno" there were only vile miasma, lurid gleams, and sounds of horror and fearfulness; but in the "Paradiso," even the glory and the music are bathed in a more ethereal, or immaterial atmosphere.

1. The heaven of Dante is pre-eminently a Universe of Light. His poem begins with the words:

"The glory of Him who moves all things penetrates through the Universe, and shines forth in one quarter more, and less in another. In the heaven which receives most of this light was I."

What he saw, he says, surpasses utterance:

"Nathless all  
That in my thoughts I of that sacred realm  
Could store, shall now be subject of my song."

Light, then, is the most essential characteristic of the poem. Everywhere there is light: in every circle of the planetary, and the starry and the crystalline heavens, and in the empyrean, and in the ladder of gold whose summit is invisible, and in the River of Life flowing with splendour between two banks bright with flowers, and in the Central Point

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of light itself so intense that no eye can gaze on it ; so minute that the smallest star in the firmament would seem a moon beside it. The very regions through which Dante passes are like eternal pearls, and he and Beatrice glide through them as rays of light enter transparent water, lucid and white as sunstruck diamonds. And in this brimming flood of light move the beatified saints in melody and glory, circling round Dante in vivid garlands of eternal roses, or swathed in environments of ambient radiance, shooting from place to place, like fires in alabaster—happy fires, living topazes, living rubies, flaming in ethereal sunshine, multitudes of splendours flitting through the crystal gleam like birds. And even after these unimaginable “varieties of light and combinations of stars, and rays, and jewelled reflections,” there are fresh throngs of splendours, cressets and crowns and circles singing round the Virgin in ineffable, indescribable glories, in blinding and bewildering brilliancies. And the inmost paradise is one great White Rose, and its yellow centre is the central light, whose circumference would outgird the sun, and its petals upon petals are innumerable ranks of spotless spirits, all gazing upon the Light of Light ; and as bees flit among flowers, so fluttering about the petals of the Eternal Rose—their wings of gold, their robes white as snow, their faces radiant as pure flame, enjoying and enjoyed—the multitudes of the Angels deposit

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in the recesses of those happy petals the peace and glory brought down from the bosom of God Himself.

2. And besides being permeated with light, the heavens also ring with perpetual Music, angelic, archangelic, the music of the spheres, and the hymns of holy spirits.

"That sing, and singing in their glory move."

Music is undoubtedly the one earthly science which seems to open widest to our imagination the door of heaven

"On golden hinges moving."

We may quote the celebrated words of Newman :  
"By musical sounds great unknown wonders seem to be typified. There are but seven notes in the scale ; make them fourteen, yet what slender outfit for so vast an enterprise ! What science brings so much out of so little ! Out of what poor elements does some great master in it create his new world ! Shall we say that all this exuberant inventiveness is mere ingenuity, a trick of art without reality, without meaning ? Is it possible that all this inexhaustible evolution and disposition of notes, so rich yet so simple, so intricate yet so regular, so various yet so majestic, should be a mere sound which is gone and perishes ? Can it be that those mysterious stirrings of the heart and keen emotions, and strange yearn-

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ings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not whence, should be wrought in us by what is unsubstantial, and comes and goes, and begins and ends in itself? It is not so! It cannot be! No! they have escaped from some higher sphere; they are the outpourings of eternal harmony in the medium of created sound; they are echoes from our home; they are the voice of angels, or the Magnificat of saints, or the living laws of divine governance. Something they are besides themselves which we cannot compass, which we cannot utter, though mortal man, and he perhaps not otherwise distinguished among his fellows, has the art of eliciting them." And in this respect our own Milton, himself a musician, felt exactly as Dante did. These lines, "At a Solemn Music," are quite in the spirit of his mighty predecessor:

"Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of heaven's joy,  
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,  
Wed your divine sounds, and mixed powers employ,  
And to our high-raised phantasy present  
That undisturbèd song of pure concent,  
Aye sung before the sapphire-coloured throne,  
To Him that sits thereon,  
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee;  
Where the bright Seraphim in burning row  
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow,  
And the Cherubic host in thousand quires  
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,  
With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,  
Hymns devout and holy psalms  
Singing everlastingly."

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3. Looking at the "Paradise" more in detail, we must first say a word on Dante's system of the Universe. It was a strange one, and of course wholly pre-scientific. To him the solar system was not heliocentric but geocentric—*i.e.*, the sun was not its centre, but the earth. The earth is surrounded by the two spheres of air and fire through which the Mount of Purgatory ascends. Beyond the terrestrial Paradise, at the summit of the mount, are the nine heavens of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars, and the Primum Mobile or crystalline heaven. Beyond them is the tenth heaven—the all-containing, uncontained, timeless, spaceless, motionless, boundless Empyrean. Here is "The Rose of Paradise," wherein dwell eternally the saints of God ; and at the centre of this Rose is an effulgent lake, formed by the reflection of the Uncreated Light. This Rose is so placed that a line drawn from its centre to our globe would touch the earthly Jerusalem. At the centre of this effulgence, manifested as one intensely luminous point, is the Divine Essence. Round this atomic point of burning brilliancy, circle nine orders of angels, divided into three hierarchies. First and nearest are the hierarchies of Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones ; next the Dominations, Virtues, and Powers ; then the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. These hierarchies are first set forth in the ancient work ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite,

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and Milton often alludes to them in the "Paradise Lost," as in the lines—

"Hear all ye Angels, progeny of light,  
Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Princedoms, Powers."

Dante was permeated with the conception that "God is Light." And here again we note how much the ideas of our Milton resemble those of Dante, when he sings,

"Hail, holy Light! offspring of Heaven first-born!  
Or of the Eternal co-eternal beam,  
May I express thee unblamed? since God is light,  
And never but in unapproachèd light  
Dwelt from eternity—dwelt then in thee,  
Bright effluence of bright essence uncreate!  
Or hear'st thou rather, pure ethereal stream,  
Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the sun,  
Before the heavens thou wert."

Into this region, where there is neither Space nor Time, but only Light, Dante is led by Beatrice. Her eyes are fixed on the eternally revolving circles of the inmost heaven; his eyes are fixed on her. For Beatrice now stands as a symbol of divine science, and her eyes, as Dante explains in the "Convito," are the demonstrations of truth, as her smiles are its persuasions. And in the demonstrations and persuasions of wisdom "is felt the highest pleasure of beatitude, which is the greatest good in Paradise."

4. The Rose of Paradise is divided horizontally

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and vertically. Below the horizontal division are the millions of those who have died innocent as infants and children. At the left of the vertical division are the Old Testament saints who died before the coming of Christ, yet looked forward to it in hope. Their seats are all full. At the right are the saints of the Gospel dispensation, whose seats are only partly full. This reminds us of the famous statue of Christ on the west front of Amiens Cathedral, known as the Beau Dieu d'Amiens. At the left are the saints and patriarchs of the ancient dispensation looking towards Him with faces full of ardent hope; at the right are the apostles and saints of the Gospels, looking upon Him with faces bright with the rapture of glorious fruition.

The nine heavens are assigned to different orders of saints. The ninth, starless, crystalline heaven, is revolved by the Seraphim. Beyond this is the Empyrean; and here the nine angelic orders of the celestial hierarchy wheel in fiery rings around the Light, which no man can approach unto. Here dwell the very elect. It is the heaven of intuition, the heaven of angels and saints, who gaze for ever on the Trinity in Unity and the Incarnate Word. And here "in super-eminence of beatific vision, progressing the dateless and irrevoluble circle of eternity, they clasp inseparable hands in joy and bliss in over-measure for ever."



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5. Before he plunges into this region of divine eternal and dazzling abstractions, Dante seems to have felt how few minds were qualified, or would care to follow him. He says at the beginning of the second canto :

" All ye who, in small bark, have following sailed,  
Eager to listen, on the adventurous track  
Of my proud keel, that singing cuts her way,  
Backward return with speed, and your own shores  
Revisit : nor put out to open sea,  
Where, losing me, perchance ye may remain  
Bewildered in deep maze.  
The way I pass ne'er yet was run." \*

6. After leaving the Mount of Purgatory, Dante has risen by the sort of counter-gravitation of spirituality, with Beatrice, into what seemed like a lucid, close, solid, and shining cloud, a sort of eternal pearl, into which he entered as a ray of light enters the water. It is the lowest heaven of the Moon ; and here first the music of the spheres bursts upon his hearing.

And since the moon waxes and wanes, this is the circle assigned to those whose vows have partially failed from some deficiency of will. Here Dante

\* Exactly in the same spirit Milton prays :

" Still govern thou my song  
Urania, and fit audience find though few."

And even in the " Purgatorio " Dante has bidden those only to follow his song who desire to feed on the bread of the angels, which men may taste even here on earth, though not enough to satisfy.

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sees gleaming visions of many faces ; and speaking to the gleam that seemed most desirous to commune with him, finds that he is speaking to Piccarda, the sister of his wife, Gemma Donati, and of Forese, and Corso. This is the lowest heaven, and Piccarda is only here because she had been a nun, but her brother Corso had compelled her to leave her convent and marry ; a marriage which she only survived for a few months. He asks her whether the spirits in the lower spheres are conscious of any loss because they are not in a higher place, where they may enjoy fuller vision. He receives this very beautiful and striking answer :

" She, with those other spirits, gently smiled ;  
Then answer'd with such gladness that she seem'd  
With love's first flame to glow : ' Brother, our will  
Is in composure, settled by the power  
Of charity which makes us will alone  
What we possess, and nought beyond desire  
If we should wish to be exalted more,  
Then would our wishes clash with the high will  
Of Him who sets us here,  
And in His will is high tranquillity.  
It is the mighty ocean, whither tends  
Whatever it creates and nature makes."

And Dante adds :

" Then saw I clearly how each spot in Heaven  
Is Paradise, though with like gracious dew  
The supreme virtue shower not over all."

Piccarda then shows him the spirit of the Empress

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Costanza, daughter of Roger, King of Sicily, whom her brother had taken from her convent to marry her to Henry VI., son of Frederic Barbarossa. Then she vanished like a body that sinks in water, singing the Ave Maria as she disappeared. Perhaps what Piccarda said to him may remind us of Whittier's lines :

" My God, my God, if thither led  
By Thy free grace unmerited,  
No crown or palm be mine, but let me keep  
A heart that still can feel, and eyes that still may weep—"

and of Kingsley's prayer—not that he may receive any throne of glory in that realm beyond the grave, but only that he may be thought worthy of being admitted into any distant place, were it even the humblest and farthest and lowest in God's kingdom.

7. The conversation had suggested to Dante some questions about Plato's hypothesis of the return of disembodied spirits to the stars. Beatrice answers that though the degree of blessedness seems to vary, since "one star differeth from another star in glory," yet all the blessed practically have their seats in the highest heaven, and are not fixed in particular spheres. Then Dante has another difficulty : "Why should souls suffer for a vow broken only through violence?" She answers that there are degrees of will, that the *absolute* will cannot really be overborne by force, and that this final freedom of the will is the greatest of God's gifts.

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8. Then, as an arrow from a bow, they sped into the second heaven, of Mercury, inhabited by rulers who have been active in the pursuit of praise. Here the Emperor Justinian gives them his swift and nobly impressive sketch of what the Roman Eagle has done from the days of Romulus to those of Charlemagne. Here, too, they meet with Romeo, who, after rendering splendid service to Raymond, Count of Berenger, and contriving the marriage of his four daughters to four kings, had been driven away by lying malice, and forced in his old age to beg his bread.

9. Then they ascend insensibly to the third heaven, that of Venus, the heaven of Holy Love, where Dante converses with Charles Martel, son of Charles II. of Naples, a young prince whom Dante had known as a friend, but who had died at twenty-five. The prince explains to him the planetary influences which if unresisted tend to modify character, and so may cause children to degenerate from their parents. There, too, he talks with Bishop Foulk of Toulouse. Into the mouth of Foulk, Dante puts one of his denunciations of the greedy and avaricious pastors of his day, who desert the Gospels for the Decretals, and whose thoughts "went not to Nazareth where Gabriel opened his wings." But he prophesies (with reference to the removal of the Popes to Avignon in 1309) that "Rome shall soon be free from their adultery."

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10. They have now left the spheres of imperfect will, and mount to the fourth heaven, the heaven of the Sun, where dwell the spirits of wisdom and knowledge. Here they find a most interesting choir of theologians—Dionysius the Areopagite, supposed author of the book on the celestial hierarchies; Gratian, author of the Decretals; Boethius, the author of the celebrated “Consolations of Philosophy”; our own childlike and charming Venerable Bede; Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, not only one of the greatest doctors, but also of the sweetest saints of the Middle Ages; Albert the Great; and Peter Lombard, the celebrated Master of the Sentences. To these were afterwards added the Prophet Nathan, St. Chrysostom, our own St. Anselm, St. Bonaventura, and the Abbot Joachim, who wrote on the Apocalypse and was believed to have had the gift of prophecy. Dante evidently loves to linger among these sweet and holy souls. St. Thomas Aquinas, though a Dominican, is so far from feeling the passionate jealousy which afterwards raged between his Order and the Franciscans, that he pronounces a glowing eulogy on the humble St. Francis, who made Poverty his bride; and he ends by bewailing the degeneracy of the Dominican Order in his own day. Not to be outdone in generosity, St. Bonaventura, the Seraphic Doctor, follows St. Thomas, the Angelic Doctor, and—having been a Franciscan—pronounces his eulogy on St. Dominic,

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the founder of the Dominicans. St. Thomas then renews the discourse, and speaks of the greatness of King Solomon, and of rash judgments. Next, Solomon himself, at the prayer of Beatrice, solves some of Dante's doubts about the nature of the glorified bodies of the saints, which he explains as vestures of light radiated from the love of God.

11. They next ascend to the fifth heaven of Mars, where they see a great vision of Christ on the Cross, and the souls of warriors passing to and fro upon it, uttering hymns of ineffable melody to the Conqueror of Death. Here Dante is greeted by the spirit of his crusading ancestor Cacciaguida, who draws an exquisite picture of Florence in the days when she was peaceful, simple, and chaste; when the ladies of Florence did not revel in rich attire, nor daughters prove to be a terror to their fathers, but plied the spindle and distaff, in sweet childlike obedience, and the pure love of home; and when Florentine nobles were brave and simple, and the city full of high aspirations. Cacciaguida goes on to foretell to his descendant his sad exile, and urges him to be brave, and always speak the truth and shame the devil. His exile will be due to the Pope of that city "where Christ is all day long made merchandise"; and Dante shall be maligned, and shall have experience

"How salt a taste cleaves to a patron's bread,  
How hard it is to climb a patron's stairs."

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Such were the treacheries hidden behind a few revolving years. "I wish not," he said, "that thou be envious against thy neighbours,—because *thy* life is set in the future, far beyond the chastisement of their perfidies." Dante hopes that the threatened peril will not make him a timid friend to truth; and then the spirit—sparkling like a mirror of gold in the sun's ray—bids him speak the truth and fear not. Saddened by the prophecy, Dante is encouraged by the glory in the holy eyes of Beatrice, who bids him look on the arms of the visionary cross, while Cacciaugida names the saints who shine upon it—each of whom flashes out as his name is uttered: Joshua, and Judas Maccabaeus, and Charlemagne, and Roland, and Godfrey of Bouillon, and others.

12. Then they ascend to the sixth heaven, that of Jupiter, where the flying spirits of Rulers have arranged themselves into the words *Diligite justitiam qui judicatis terram*; and when they reached the last M, they passed into the form of the Lily of Florence with an eagle's head; and then into the Imperial Eagle; and the saints who formed the beak of the eagle sang of their exaltation through their love of justice and mercy. Then the saints, shining like rubies all over the eagle, began to compare the justice of man with the infinite justice of God, and then to denounce the reigning sovereigns of Europe: the Emperor Albert, for invading Bohemia; Philip

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the Fair of France, for falsifying the coinage; our Edward I. for his ambition; Frederick of Aragon, for luxurious living; and Charles the Lamé of Naples, whose virtues might be represented by I (for one), and his vices by M (for a thousand). The Eagle proceeds to tell that its eye is formed of the spirits of David, Hezekiah, and other good kings, among whom are Trajan and Rhipeus, who, though once Pagans, have been made perfectly virtuous by miracles of grace. Trajan owes his beatification apparently to a pure mistake. There was, opposite to the Pantheon, in old days a bas-relief representing a City, symbolised as a female, doing homage to Trajan. This was misinterpreted into the story of Trajan and the widow, which caused Gregory to secure by his prayers the liberation of Trajan from the Limbo. Trajan was popularly supposed to have been by a miracle resuscitated and baptized; and Rhipeus to have been baptized by the outpouring of the Spirit.

13. They then passed to the seventh heaven, of Saturn, where Beatrice smiles no longer, for otherwise her smile would consume Dante by its burning gleam. For a similar reason no heavenly song is heard there, because it would be too overpowering. This is explained to Dante by St. Peter Damian. In this sphere he sees the golden ladder of Jacob, emblem of divine contemplation. St. Peter Damian then proceeds (as indeed he had done in life) to



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denounce the backslidings of the clergy into luxury, sloth, and avarice ; whereat the air became full of spirits like flamelets, and a cry like thunder went up from the multitude, which terrified the poet's heart. In this heaven they see St. Benedict, the founder of the great Benedictine Order at Monte Cassino. He shines like the largest and brightest of pearls, and he points out "other fires," who were men of contemplation, "kindled with that heat which brings to birth the holy flowers and fruits"; among them is the hermit St. Macarius of Egypt, and St. Romuald the founder of the Camaldolese in Casentino. St. Benedict promises that, higher up, he will be visible in bodily form, when Dante has mounted that ladder of Jacob "to ascend which no one now parts his feet on earth." Then he complains that his famous Rule of St. Benedict has now on earth become mere waste-paper, because "the walls that used to be an abbey are now dens of thieves ; and the cowls are sacks full of the flour of sin, in which the Church hoards its wealth," which she no longer gives to the poor, but to relatives or worse. Luxury now abounds, whereas St. Peter began without gold or silver, and St. Francis in humility, and he himself with prayer and fasting. But now the white is turned to brown, and God alone could perform the miracle of reformation. Then he drew back to his company, which closed up, and gathered itself to heaven as with a whirlwind.

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14. Then Dante with Beatrice begins to mount the ladder, but in a moment they were in the sign of the Gemini, the heaven of the fixed stars. Thence they looked down upon earth through all the planetary heavens, smiling at the mean semblance of "the little floor that makes us mortals so fierce." In this heaven they see a vision of the Triumph of Christ surrounded by His saints. The Virgin, crowned by the archangel Gabriel with a wreath of lilies formed of light and melody—she being herself "the fair sapphire wherewith the brightest heaven is jewelled"—followed Christ upwards, while the saints chant *Regina*, and remained behind. From the throng came forth the Apostle Peter, who examines Dante on faith, and approves his answers. Then St. James questions him concerning hope; and St. John the Evangelist joins them, in light so dazzling that Dante is for the moment blinded. St. John questions Dante about the love of God, and then amid the chant of "Holy, holy, holy," Beatrice points out to Dante our Father Adam, who speaks to Dante about the first state of man. But at that point came a change in the effulgence. The saints were all chanting "Glory to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," so that (surrounded by what seemed to him the smile of the Universe, and hearing this seraphic chant) Dante feels inebriated with gladness, and exclaims, "Oh joy! Oh ineffable blitheness! Oh life complete of love and

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peace! Oh riches secure without craving!" when lo! of the four torches burning before him—the three Apostles and Adam—the form of St. Peter began to bicker into a flash of angry redness, sympathetically reflected by the rest of the blessed company, as St. Peter exclaims, "If I change my hue, marvel not. He that usurps on earth MY PLACE, MY PLACE, MY PLACE, which is vacant in the sight of the Son of God, has of the city of my burial made a chaos of the blood and of the filth, wherewith the Perverse One is appeased down there, who fell from the place on high!" At these words of indignation, as it were a burning blush overspread the face of heaven, while St. Peter continues that the Church, the Bride of Christ, has not been nurtured by the blood of the early martyrs only to be degraded into gain of gold after the martyrdoms and tears of the early and sainted popes; nor were his keys meant to be borne on the devil's banners to fight against baptized Christians; nor was it ever meant that he (St. Peter) should be a figure on a seal affixed to traffic and lying privileges, whereat he often blushed and glowed. But there are now seen, in the pastures, ravening wolves in shepherd's clothing, and Jews and usurers are preparing to drink our blood. "Oh defence of God, why slumberest thou ever? Oh good beginning, to what vile end must thou needs fall! But the promise from on high will soon come to aid." St.

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Peter then bids Dante reveal to the world what he has seen.

15. The air becomes full of a snow of fire, and they mount to the ninth heaven, the *Primum Mobile*, where there is neither time nor place and "no other Where than the Mind of God." It is the source of all motion, and is girt about with Light and Love, which suggests to Beatrice the meanness of cupidity, so that innocence and faith remain with babes alone. Then Dante sees a point of intense brightness, and, revolving around it, nine circles which are the hierarchies of angels, respecting whose orders and nature Beatrice discourses to him, digressing for a moment to reprove the silly and vulgar buffooneries which had become common in sermons, of which mediæval records furnish us with many proofs.

16. Then, lastly, they mount to the *Empyrean*, and the *Rose of the Blessed*, which he at first mistakes for a river of light resplendent with splendours. From hence issued living sparks, which, like gold-encircled rubies, settled on the flowers upon its banks, until, as though inebriate with odours, they would plunge again into the wondrous stream. The ruby-like sparks are Angels, and the flowers are blessed spirits. Here Beatrice parts from Dante and takes her place amongst the blessed, leaving him to the tutelage of the ardent St. Bernard, who shows him the place where sits the Virgin Mary, and the order of the various saints, and speaks to

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him of the salvation of infants. St. Bernard breaks into a hymn to the Virgin, and Dante gazes fixedly on the divine light. There he sees the vision of the Triune God.

“ In that abyss

Of radiance, clear and lofty, seem'd methought  
Three orbs of triple hue, clipt in one bound,  
And from the other, one reflected seemed,  
As rainbow is from rainbow : and the third  
Seem'd fire, breath'd equally from both.

Here vigour failed the towering fantasy.  
But yet the will rolled onward like a wheel  
In even motion, by the love impelled  
That moves the sun in heaven and all the stars.”

So ends one of the grandest, but at the same time one of the most abstract and difficult poems ever written. It actually uplifts and dilates our mortal nature, to observe the sublime confidence, the holy audacity of human grandeur, with which the poet ventures, with unfaltering footstep, to tread alike the burning marle of Hell; the steep ascent of Purgatory; and the eternal azure of the floor of of Heaven: nor this only, but to mingle with Saints, Patriarchs, Apostles, Prophets, Kings, amid the glories of lucent Seraphim and ardent Cherubim; nor even this only, but to stand before the very throne of the Triune God, under the glory of that rainbow in sight like unto an emerald. Of our own Milton the poet Gray says that

“ He rode sublime  
Upon the seraph wings of Ecstasy ;

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The secrets of the abyss to spy.  
He passed the flaming bounds of time and space,  
The living throne, the sapphire blaze,  
Where angels tremble while they gaze;  
He saw—but blasted with excess of light,  
Closed his eyes in endless night."

The last line is a fanciful allusion to Milton's blindness; but Dante did not close his eyes in night. Nay, the inward illumination adds to the clearness of the outward vision, and amid the anguish of his exile, his poverty, and his earthly defeat, he passed along the steep uphillward path of life, not only "bating no jot of heart or hope," but more and more confident, and more and more convinced that the Spirit witnesseth with our spirit that we are sons of God; and that, by His grace, it is possible for us to win that eternal foretaste of immortality, wherein man is unspeakably uplifted above the low levels of animalism, and the wretched bitterness of sin, because he has attained to that ethereal realm

"Where God in man is one with man in God."

Dante feels, with St. Thomas Aquinas, that "the last and perfect happiness of man cannot be otherwise than in the vision of the Divine Essence." He ended his letter to Can Grande (which must surely be genuine) with the words: "And because, when the Beginning or First, which is God, has been

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found, there is nothing further to be sought—since He is the Alpha and Omega, that is, the Beginning and the End, as the vision of John sheweth—the treatise ends in God Himself, who is blessed for ever and ever.”\*

\* I borrow both these passages from Mr. E. C. Gardner's “Dante's Ten Heavens,” which only came into my hands after I had written this paper.





MILTON



## MILTON

“**A** TEACHER,” says Goethe, “who can arouse a feeling for one single good action, for one single good poem, accomplishes more than he who fills the memory with rows on rows of natural objects.” To me, for years, not only have the poems of Milton been a delight, but his character has been an example, and his thoughts a strong consolation and support. “Character,” as Emerson said, “is higher than intellect”; and Milton was not only one of the world’s mightiest poets, but also a supremely noble man.

I will endeavour, then, to bring before my readers in this paper a great mind and a great character. Milton, like Dante, is one of those whose books cannot be separated from their personality. His character is itself a great book. Wherever I can, I shall let Milton speak for himself, especially in the

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lordly and impassioned eloquence of his prose writings; and as Mr. Gladstone has said that hardly before manhood was he aware that Milton had written any prose works at all, and as those works contain some of the most splendid passages in English literature, I may hope that those quotations may turn the attention of my readers to the books themselves.

1. My estimate of Milton is that of some of the greatest and most sober minds. It has, for instance, been said that Wordsworth was "like Milton in dignity of aim, gravity of life, early and deliberate dedication to poetry; high self-appreciation; haughty self-reliance and majesty of sentiment." And Wordsworth calls Milton

"Soul awful, if this world has ever held  
An awful soul."

and says :

"We must be free or die who speak the tongue  
That Shakespeare spoke, the faith and morals hold  
That Milton held."

And he sums up his high appreciation in this noble sonnet :

"Milton, thou should'st be living at this hour :  
England hath need of thee : she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters ; altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower,

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Of inward happiness. We are selfish men  
Oh! raise us up,—return to us again ;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart :  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea :  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay."

Walter Savage Landor went so far as to say : " It may be doubted whether the Creator ever created one altogether so great as Milton, taking into our view at once his manly virtues, his superhuman genius, his zeal for truth, for true piety, true freedom, his contempt for personal power ; his glory and exultation in his country's."

And, again :

" He indulges in no pranks and vagaries to captivate the vulgar mind ; he leads by the light of his countenance, never stooping to grasp a coarse hand to obtain its suffrages. His gravity is unsuitable to the age we live in. The cedars and palms of his Paradise have disappeared ; we see the earth before us in an altered form ; we see dense and dwarf plants upon it everywhere ; we see it scratched by a succession of squatters, who rear a thin crop, and leave the place dry and barren. Constancy and perseverance are among Milton's characteristics, with contempt of everything mean and sordid. Indifference to celebrity, disdain for popularity, un-

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obtrusive wisdom, sedate grandeur, energy kept in its high and spacious armoury until the signal of action sounded, until the enemy was to be driven from his entrenchments—these are above the comprehension, above the gaze of noisy drummers, in their caps and tassels. Milton stood conspicuous over the mines of fuel he accumulated for that vast lighthouse, founded on a solitary rock, which threw forth its radiance to Europe from amid the darkness and storminess of the British sea.”

And, to quote but one more eulogium, Tennyson apostrophises Milton as

“ O mighty-mouth'd inventor of harmonies,  
O skilled to sing of Time and Eternity,  
God-gifted organ-voice of England,  
Milton, a name to resound for ages.”

2. We have three authentic and deeply interesting portraits of Milton. The first is a portrait of him when he was a child of ten years old, by the Dutch painter Cornelius Jansen, painted in 1618. It shows us a little Roundhead, grave, serious, beautiful; but, to give it life, you must, to borrow his own phrase, “envermeil” the round cheek with a healthy rose, and give a gleam of gold to the auburn hair, which his Puritan tutors had cut short; his eyes were hazel, the eyebrows finely pencilled; the mouth a perfect Cupid’s bow. Thus, as Aubrey says, “his harmonick and ingeniose soul did lodge in a beautiful and well-proportioned body . . . the

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complexion was exceeding faire . . . he had a delicate tuneable voice." As he stood before his friends, with his thoughtful face, frilled lace collar, and braided dress, he was indeed a child of whom to be proud, and one in whom the opening dawn of life seemed to promise a golden day. His father, the good Bread Street scrivener, must have been proud of his little son, or he would not have paid "five broad pieces" for his likeness. When the picture was engraved in 1760 by Cipriani, he placed beneath it the very appropriate lines :

"While I was yet a child, no childish play  
To me was pleasing; all my mind was set  
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do,  
What might be public good. Myself I thought  
Born to that end, born to promote all truth,  
All righteous things."

3. We may at once seize on the distinguishing characteristic of Milton's childhood. It was innocence. His days were

"Bound each to each by natural piety."

*Qualis ab incepto* might be written broad over his life, as its description. There was no discontinuity in Milton's career. "We cannot make life's reckoning twice over: you cannot mend a wrong subtraction by doing your addition right." How many, alas! do make one long subtraction, of which the deficit can never be restored. But Milton's character was as unique and stately as his immortal verse. It

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is to us a rich legacy of ideal and fulfilment ; and with the unique and superb egoism which in him is natural, he said : " If God has ever instilled into any human soul an intense love of moral beauty, He has done so into mine."

4. We pass next to Milton's boyhood, and we may at once seize two of its characteristics.

i. One was earnest diligence. Here is his own account of his boyhood :

" My father destined me from a child to the pursuits of literature, and my appetite for knowledge was so voracious, that from twelve years of age I hardly ever left my studies before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight. My eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent headaches, which, however, could not chill the ardour, or retard the progress of my improvement."\*

ii. Another characteristic was indomitable perseverance.

" When I take up a thing," he says, " I never pause, or break it off, nor am drawn away from it by any other interest, till I arrive at the goal I had proposed for myself."

5. The results of this diligence and perseverance were wonderful. When in church we sing the fine lyric :

" Let us with a gladsome mind  
Praise the Lord, for He is kind,"

\* " The Second Defence of the People of England."



## MILTON

and

“ How lovely are the dwellings fair !  
O Lord of hosts, how dear  
The pleasant tabernacles are  
Where Thou dost dwell so near,”

we are singing the paraphrases of the Psalms of which some were written by Milton when he was only a boy of fifteen. When he was sixteen I doubt whether there has ever been any boy who could match him in attainments. By that time he had a good knowledge of Greek, he was a finished Latin scholar. He wrote Latin prose, which was not a mere echo of Ciceronian phrases, but shows a perfect mastery and individuality ; and Latin poems so beautiful and masculine that they still survive. To this he added a good knowledge of the best literature which England had then produced ; a considerable acquaintance with French, Italian, and Hebrew ; and some practical skill in, and theoretical knowledge of, mathematics and music. I have had some share in the training of not a few generations of English boys, of whom many have won high honours at Oxford and Cambridge, and not a few have attained to eminence in Church and State ; but I never yet saw a boy whose attainments, at the age of sixteen, distantly approached those of Milton. He must have been a glorious pupil, and one of those so rarely found, who need the curb much more than the spur. When we see our “ young barbarians all at play ” at Harrow or Eton, there are, I imagine,

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but few in these days of whom that can be said. Yet he was no milksop or bookworm. He was fond of healthy recreation and manly exercises.

"I was never deficient," he says, "in courage and in strength, and I was wont constantly to exercise myself in the use of the broadsword. Armed with this weapon, as I usually was, I should have thought myself quite a match for any one, though much stronger than myself."\*

At school he made one delightful friend, Charles Diodati, whom he lost too early. There were no wild oats sown in Milton's boyhood, to bring up afterwards their poisonous crop; but he was like one of those mountain ashes, covered in spring with "creamy and odorous blossoms" which are the promise of the brilliant clusters which make it glow in autumn, one blaze of scarlet from its lowest twig to its topmost bough. He shows "the inevitable congruity between seed and fruit"; his boyhood was not silly, wasted, ignoble, but rich in attainments, and richer still in hope.

6. And now we come to Milton's youth. We have a second portrait of him taken at the age of twenty-one. It shows the same noble, engaging face—virginal, strong, self-confident; and now he wears the long curling locks which the child's Puritan teachers had cut so short. It was thus that he looked when at sixteen he went to Christ's College,

\* "The Second Defence."

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Cambridge. And this portrait, with its fair, flowing locks, illustrates the nature of Milton's Puritanism. It was no sour and narrow fanaticism ; no coarse and dull Philistinism. The ordinary Puritan hated cathedrals, and loved "to break down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers." Milton, on the contrary, says :

" But let my due feet never fail  
To walk the studious cloister's pale,  
And love the high embowéd roof,  
With antique pillars massy-proof,  
And storied windows richly dight,  
Casting a dim religious light."

The ordinary Puritan affected severe precision in dress ; Milton liked what was comely. The ordinary Puritan anathematised stage-plays. Milton wrote masques to be acted, and liked to refresh himself at the theatre.

" Then to the well-trod stage anon,  
If Jonson's learned sock be on,  
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,  
Warble his native woodnotes wild,

. . . . .

Or what, though rare, of later age  
Ennobled hath the buskin'd stage."

7. He delighted, too, in the glories of nature ; the green fields, the flush of spring, the shadow of the elms, the song of birds. With "his beautiful and well-proportioned body, bright face, ingenious and

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harmonical soul," with his "erect and manly gait, bespeaking courage and undauntedness," his ingenuous modesty and moral austerity, he must have been one of the most perfect youths whom England has ever seen. "I seem to see him here," says Wordsworth,

"in his scholar's dress  
Bounding before me, yet a stripling youth—  
A boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks  
Angelical, keen eye, courageous look,  
And conscious step of purity and pride."

His aspect reflected the soul of one who loved whatsoever things are true, and pure, and lovely, and of good report; and who had already given to the world poems so rich and immortal as the "Ode on the Death of a Fair Infant," and "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," and "At a Solemn Music." He says of himself in an Italian sonnet, "My heart is faithful, fearless; secure in its own adamant, though worlds flamed; free from the malice and fears of the vulgar, and loyal to all things manly." "You ask me, Charles, of what I am thinking," he wrote to his friend Diodati; "I think, so help me heaven, of immortality!"

8. His college days lasted from 1625-1633, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two; and we might well have thought that manly beauty of the highest type, singular purity, a temperament perfectly ready to unbend, a capacity for friendship,

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supreme ability, unusual attainments, would have secured unbounded popularity for this fair youth. Yet it is clear that he was not popular either with his tutors or with his fellow-undergraduates.

We can see the reason. He was too independent for the commonplace and stereotyped officials of his college. He was "a very hard student in the University, and performed all his exercises with very good applause"; yet rumour says that he was "publicly whipped" by his tutor Chappell. The assertion is certainly a piece of mean and false University scandal; but he probably was, for a short time, "sent down." It certainly was for nothing discreditable, for he openly speaks of it without the smallest touch of regret or apology. He disliked and disdained the curriculum of the University, of which Roger Bacon had said four centuries earlier, "*languet et asininat circum male intellecta.*" He could not bear to be dragged from his studies to employ himself in composing some frivolous and conventional declamation. Cambridge, with its "barren and shadeless fields," he tells us that he had never greatly admired, "even in the time of her better health, and my own younger judgment." In this he resembled Gibbon, Shelley, Gray, Landor and Wordsworth. But if the Fellows were unjust to him, and wholly failed at first to appreciate and understand him, they afterwards found out their mistake; and, he says, "signified, in many ways, how much

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better it would content them that I should stay ; as, by many letters, both of kindness and loving respect, both before this time, and long after, I was assured of their singular good affection toward me."

9. If he was not popular with the undergraduates, that, too, may be because he was made of nobler elements. Something in his fresh complexion and bright hair had earned him the nickname of Domina, "the lady of Christ's College"; and, as in the case of the younger Pitt, corrupt and vulgar natures may have sneered at his ingenuous modesty and high chastity. He had a reserved nicety and "honest haughtiness of nature" which would not be "Hail-fellow-well-met" with every Tom, Dick, and Harry who chose to slap him on the back. "I had rather," he writes, "since the life of man is likened to a scene, that all my exits and entrances should mix with such persons only whose worth erects them and their actions to a grave and tragic deportment, and not to have to do with clowns and vices." Then, again, he had not much gift of humour, but "a mind made and set only on the accomplishment of the greatest things." Add to this, he was a severe critic of the undergraduates and their performances.

The authorities at Christ's College gave him no Fellowship, though they elected much younger men who had not a tenth of his genius. But that his seven years at college were honourably and blamelessly spent is proved by the fact that "most of

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the fellows of his College," he says, "afterwards showed him no common marks of friendship and esteem," and even endeavoured to induce him to stay at Cambridge and give up his purpose of returning to his father's house.

10. We now pass from Milton's youth to his years of early manhood, between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-seven. They were years of preparation, supported by the touching faith of his father in his purposes and his ultimate achievements. The good father must doubtless have been disappointed by his declining to take Holy Orders, for which he had been intended. Both in prose and verse he has given his reasons. In "Lycidas," he makes St. Peter say of the death of his young friend Edward King :

" How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,  
Enow of such as, for their bellies' sake,  
Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold !  
Of other care they little reckoning make  
Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,  
And shove away the worthy bidden guest.  
Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold  
A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least  
That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs !

. . . . .  
And, when they list, their lean and flashy songs  
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw ;  
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,  
But, swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw,  
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread :

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Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw  
Daily devours apace, and nothing said.  
But that two-handed engine at the door  
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more! "

And in prose he speaks of "the difficult labours of the Church, to whose service, by the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destin'd of a child, and in mine own resolutions, till, coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the Church, that he who would take Orders must subscribe *slave*, I thought it better to preserve a blameless silence, before the sacred office of speaking, bought and preserved with servility and forswearing."\*

II. Yet Milton, during these years of seeming inactivity, was, he says, "something suspicious of myself, and do take notice of a certain belatedness in me." Thus he writes in his sonnet written "on his having arrived at the age of twenty-three":

"How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!  
My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.  
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth  
That I to manhood am arrived so near;  
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,  
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th,  
Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,  
It shall be still in strictest measure even

\* "The Reason of Church Government."



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To that same lot, however mean or high,  
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven :  
All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Task-Master's eye."

Yet he had no real need for self-reproach. We see from his journals that during those quiet years in the country retirement of Horton he had read and annotated no less than eighty solid books, and he must have spent many a studious hour in the library which still exists in the tower of Langley Church. He ever cherished his inward conviction "that by labour, and intense study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined to the prompting of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written as men should not willingly let die." In this lofty self-confidence—"which let Malice call Pride"—he resembled Dante, and Bacon, and Shakespeare. He was anxious "not to press forward, but to keep off with a sacred reverence and religious advisement, how best to undergo . . . not taking thought of being late, so it gave advantage to the more fit ; for those who were late lost nothing." And indeed he must have been a stern critic of himself who thought the years belated in which, having thus "pledged himself to God and his own conscience," he was but "pluming his wings and meditating flight," yet gave to the world such precious and immortal poems as "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Arcades," "Lycidas," and "Comus"; and was, all the while, "gazing on

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the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies."

12. We have fixed on innocence as the characteristic of Milton's childhood ; on earnest diligence and perseverance as the notes of his boyhood ; nor were the specific marks of his youth less noble. They were steadfastness of purpose, resolute purity of life, and lofty self-respect.

i. Steadfastness of purpose. None of Milton's life was lived at haphazard. He never was one of those who yielded to the "weight of chance desires," nor would he suffer his life to be mere "flotsam and jetsam" on the sea of time. There are many who *drift* through life, but the ideal of Milton was that of "The Happy Warrior" :

"It is the generous spirit, who, when brought  
Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought  
Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought :  
Whose high endeavours are an inward light  
That makes the path before him always bright :  
Who, with a natural instinct to discern  
What knowledge can perform, is diligent to learn ;  
Abides by this resolve, and stops not there,  
But makes his moral being his prime care."

ii. The next mark of his youth was resolute purity of life, and on this I cannot do better than quote his own glorious words both in prose and verse. In "Comus," which is mainly an immortal eulogy on the irresistible might and beauty of chastity, the

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elder brother has reminded the younger that the sister, who has lost her way in the wood, is not so defenceless as he supposes, since she has a hidden strength ; not only the strength of heaven, but

" 'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity :  
She that has that is clad in complete steel ;  
And, like a quiver'd nymph with arrows keen,  
May trace huge forests and unharbour'd heaths,  
Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds.

So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity  
That, when a soul is found sincerely so,  
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,  
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt."

This is only a fragment of that noble speech which I recommend to my youthful readers. And in his "Apology for Smectymnuus," he wrote this most glorious passage: "And long it was not when I was confirmed in this opinion that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem, that is a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things. Even then I learned what a noble virtue chastity sure must be—only this my mind gave me, that every free and gentle spirit, without that oath, ought to be born a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt spur, or the laying of a sword upon his shoulder, to stir him up to secure and protect the weakness of any attempted chastity." And, he adds, that besides his careful training in the

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Christian religion, "a certain reservedness of natural disposition and moral discipline, learnt out of the noblest philosophy, was enough to keep me in disdain of far less incontinencies. But having had the doctrine of Holy Scripture, unfolding those chaste and high mysteries with timeliest care infused, that the body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body, I argued to myself that if unchastity in a woman be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man it must, though not commonly so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable."

iii. And the third mark of his dawning manhood was that high self-respect on which I will quote from his "Reason of Church Government" a passage which has always seemed to me one of the noblest in the English language. As is the case with the other passage to which I have referred, it should be read entire, but here, for want of space, I must abbreviate :

"But there is a yet more ingenuous and noble degree of honest shame, or call it if you will, an esteem whereby men bear an inward reverence towards their own persons. And if the love of God, as a fire sent from heaven, to be ever kept alive upon the altars of our hearts, be the first principle of all godly and virtuous actions in men, this pious and just honouring of ourselves is the second, and may be thought as the radical moisture and

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fountain-head whence every laudable and worthy enterprise issues forth. Something I confess it is to be ashamed of evil-doing in the presence of any; and to reverence the opinion and countenance of a good man rather than a bad, fearing most in his sight to offend, goes so far as almost to be virtuous; yet this is but still the fear of infamy, and many such, when they find themselves alone, saving their reputation, will compound with other scruples, and come to a close treaty with their dearer vices in secret. But he that holds himself in reverence and due esteem, both for the dignity of God's image upon him, and for the price of his redemption, which he thinks is visibly marked upon his forehead, accounts himself both a fit person to do the noblest and godliest deeds, and much better worth than to deject and defile, with such a debasement and such a pollution as sin is, himself so highly ransomed and ennobled to a new friendship and filial relation with God. Nor can he fear so much the offence and reproach of others as he dreads, and would blush at the reflection of his own severe and modest eye upon himself, if it should see him doing or imagining that which is sinful, though in the deepest secrecy."

13. We pass on now to a fifth stage in Milton's life—his travels. It was the year 1638, and he had reached the age of twenty-nine. His father, never swerving in confidence of his son's aims, cheerfully paid his expenses. Sir Henry Wotton gave him the

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kind and well-meant advice, "*I pensieri stretti ed il viso sciolto*" (thoughts close, and face frank). But such advice was not for Milton, even in the home of the Inquisition. In that memorable journey he conversed with the great Grotius; was welcomed by the highest literary society of Florence; had an interview with "the starry Galileo"; and was received with open arms by the Marquis Giovanni Battista Manso at Naples, in the palace which had already given a home to Marini and Tasso. The two Latin lines which Manso addressed to Milton, saying that he would have been an angel if he had not been an Anglican, show both that Milton still retained his remarkable personal beauty, and also the indomitable courage, freedom, and truthfulness which made it impossible for him, for the sake of popularity, to conceal the fervour of his Protestant opinions. How well would it have been for England if all young Englishmen at the close of their travels—especially in days when Italy was unspeakably corrupt, and the proverb ran, "*Inglese italianato diavolo incarnato*"—could have said, as Milton did amid the calumnious lies of his enemies: "I take God to witness, that, in all those places where so many things are considered lawful, I lived sound and untouched from any profligacy and vice, having this thought perpetually with me, that, though I might escape the eyes of men, I certainly could not escape the eye of God."

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14. So far then we have traced the career of Milton, and illustrated it from his writings—and especially from those prose works which are so far less known than they should be—until his return to England, about the age of thirty.

We must now turn to the sixth stage of Milton's career, the period of *Sturm und Drang*—of storm and strife, of calamities and disappointment. It might almost be said that at thirty ended the ease and unclouded happiness of his days on earth. His travels were suddenly cut short by the stern and threatening news which kept reaching him from England. He was personally saddened by the intelligence of the early death of his best friend, Charles Diodati. He at once broke the even tenor, and laid aside the settled purpose, of his life. "I considered it dishonourable," he wrote, "to be taking my ease in foreign lands, while my countrymen were striking a blow for freedom." He did indeed, as he tells us, hate the task of political conflict; but he did not shrink from it.

"I trust to make it manifest," he wrote, "with what small willingness I endure to interrupt no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful, confident thoughts, to embark on a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes."\*

Never abandoning the high purpose of his youth

\* "The Reason of Church Government."

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to write some immortal epic on one of the thirteen subjects from which he ultimately selected "Paradise Lost," he laid the intention aside during the best years of his life, because he thought that God called him to a more urgently needful, if infinitely less delightful task. We know not whether more to admire the steadfast purpose ; or the heroic self-sacrifice, with which for such long and stormy years it was laid aside ; or the passion for liberty which made the efforts for the good of his country seem a supream aim. The intensity of his patriotic feelings is illustrated by language which seems to flush with burning passion, of which the closing paragraphs of his "Reformation in England" furnish a specimen. They are further interesting from their prophecy of his own future intentions.

"Then," he says, "amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints, some one may perhaps be heard offering at high strains in new and lofty measure to sing and celebrate Thy divine mercies and marvellous judgments in this land, throughout all ages, whereby this great and warlike nation may press on hard to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian people, when Thou the eternal King shalt open the clouds to judge the several kingdoms of the world . . . ; where they undoubtedly that, by their labours, counsels, and prayers, have been earnest for the common good of religion and their country, shall receive above the inferior orders of the blessed the



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regal addition of principalities, legions and thrones unto their glorious titles, and, in supereminence of beatific vision, progressing the dateless and irrevoluble circle of eternity, shall clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss in overmeasure for ever.

“ But they contrary that, by impairing and diminution of the true faith, the distress and servitude of their country, aspire to high dignity, rule and promotion here, after a shameful end in this life (which God grant them), shall be thrown down eternally into the darkest and deepest gulf of hell, where, under the despiteful control, the trample and spurn of all the other damned—that, in the anguish of their torture, shall have no other ease than to exercise a raving and bestial tyranny over them, as their slaves and negroes—they shall remain in that plight for ever, the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot, and downtrodden vassals of perdition.”

Language so tremendous is not, of course, to be taken quite *au pied de la lettre*, but it serves to illustrate the fiery earnestness generated by the awful struggles involved in the achievement of freedom by the English people.

Milton did not, indeed, at once plunge into the vortex of civil strife, either as a soldier or a statesman; but, waiting till God opened the way for him, he became the champion of his country in those intellectual regions in which all conflicts must be

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ultimately decided. For twenty years he fought against the tyranny of kings and prelates, pouring out pamphlet after pamphlet of powerful Latin, and magnificently impassioned English, in defence of the Puritans and of the Parliament. Meanwhile he engaged in the task of trying to carry out his ideal of education. In his fine Tractate he says: "I call a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously, all offices, both public and private, of peace and war, and the true end of learning is to repair the ruin of our first parents, by regaining to know God aright."

15. From this period begins the story of Milton's calamities; and it is sad that among the heaviest we must count his marriage. It was the first wave in the tremendous flood of his misfortunes. Won by the face of Mary Powell, then seventeen, and clothing her with imaginary perfections, he took the girl from the loose freedom of her home in the house of the roystering and bankrupt cavalier, only to be fearfully disillusioned, and in all probability grossly outraged, before the honeymoon was over. He found her a mere Philistine, utterly incompatible, an image of phlegm and repellency; while she found in the quiet and studious home of the Puritan something between a tomb and a torment. She left him; did not answer his letters; dismissed his messenger with contempt. Stung to the very depths of his indignant being, he wrote those pamphlets on divorce

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which raised a swarm of hornets about his ears. Afterwards she flung herself at his feet and implored his pardon.

In "Paradise Lost" we have a reminiscence of the scene, where Eve weeps before her ruined husband:

"She ended, weeping; and her lowly plight,  
Immovable, till peace obtain'd from fault  
Acknowledged and deplored, in Adam wrought  
Commiseration. Soon his heart relented  
Towards her, his life so late, and sole delight,  
Now at his feet submissive in distress . . .  
As one disarm'd, his anger all he lost,  
And thus with peaceful words upraised her soon."

He not only took her back with magnanimous forgiveness, but, during the civil troubles, gave a free home to her insulting and impecunious family. His infant son died, but she bore him three daughters, who, by a fatal atavism, reproducing the characteristics of their mother's family, were undutiful, cheated and pilfered him in his blindness, and lit the fires of hell upon his hearth. He loved dearly his second wife—Katherine Woodcock—"my late-espoused saint," to whom he addresses an exquisite sonnet; but he lost her and her infant child within a year. His third wife, Elizabeth Minshull, was kind and loving, but the intolerable family feuds between her and her stepdaughters at last necessitated an arrangement by which they should live elsewhere.

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16. The next calamity from which he had to suffer was the overwhelming deadliness of hatred which, in doing his duty, he was called on to incur from all sides. Salmasius and Morus exhausted the vocabulary of vituperation in describing him as a physical monster and a moral leper, and in telling the grossest lies about his person and about his life—and it must be remembered that at that time Salmasius had the ear of Europe. One of his contemporaries described "Paradise Lost" as "a profane and lascivious poem." The rage against him voiced itself in unparalleled execrations, in personal threats, in nameless insults. Let two instances suffice. Even the excellent Bishop Hacket, in his life of Lord Keeper Williams, has no better terms for Milton than these: "What a venomous spirit is in that serpent Milton, that black-mouthed Zodus that blows his viper's breath upon those immortal devotions . . . a petty schoolboy scribbler . . . Get thee behind me, Milton! Thou savourest not the things that be of truth and loyalty, but of pride, bitterness and falsehood. But there will be a time though such a Shimei, a dead dog in Abishai's phrase . . . this cankerworm Milton . . . escape for a while." The famous scene in "Woodstock" is most closely true to life, in which the old cavalier, Sir Henry Lee, bursts into execrations against his nephew Markham Everard for having induced him to praise the noble lines in "Comus" which begin:

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"O welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope,  
Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings."

Sir Henry warmly applauded the passage before he learnt the name of the author. But when Master Kerneguy (who is Charles II. in the disguise of a page) tells him that the lines were by John Milton, the old knight bursts out in furious astonishment: "John Milton! What! John Milton the blasphemous and bloody-minded author of the '*Defensio Populi Anglicani*!' the advocate of the infernal High Court of Fiends; the creature and parasite of that grand impostor, that loathsome hypocrite, that detestable monster, that prodigy of the universe, that disgrace of mankind, that landscape of iniquity, that sink of sin, that compendium of baseness, Oliver Cromwell! Markham Everard, I will never forgive thee—never, never! Thou hast made me speak words of praise respecting one whose offal should fatten the region kites."

The scene is closely true to history; and even in that "sublime independence of human sympathy, like that with which mountains fascinate and rebuff us," there is no doubt that Milton keenly felt this madness of hatred and this tornado of lies. Yet, when he began to sing the archangelic strains of "*Paradise Lost*," it was

"With voice unchanged  
To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,

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On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues,  
In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round,  
And solitude."

To these miseries was added what might well have seemed the most utterly irreparable to a proud and lonely scholar—the horror of blindness, with the helpless dependence which it involves. And this happened to him at the age of forty-three. How awfully he felt it may be seen in that most tragic outburst of wailing in "Samson Agonistes," which begins :

" But, chief of all,  
O loss of sight, of thee I most complain !  
Blind among enemies ! O worse than chains,  
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age !"

Yet he tells us that he was ready to pay even this cost in the accomplishment of his duty, and that his support in the loss of his eyes was

" The conscience to have lost them overplied  
In Liberty's defence, my noble task  
Of which all Europe rings from side to side."

And, again : " It is not so wretched to be blind as not to be capable of enduring blindness. . . . I would not have listened to the voice even of Æsculapius himself from the shrine of Epidaurus, in preference to the suggestions of the heavenly monitor within my breast. My resolution was unshaken, though the alternative was either the loss of my sight or the desertion of my duty."

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17. His enemies represented his blindness as a divine judgment. He replied that it was neither the object of his shame nor of his regret. "I am not depressed," he said, "by any sense of the divine displeasure. In the most momentous periods I have had full experience of the divine favour and protection. In the solace and the strength which have been infused into me I have been enabled to do the will of God. I oftener think on what He has bestowed than on what He has withheld. I am unwilling to exchange my consciousness of rectitude with that of any other person, and I feel in the recollection a treasured store of tranquillity and delight." And in the "Paradise Lost" he sings:

" Yet not the more  
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt  
Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,  
Smit with the love of sacred song."

18. We now come to the last epoch of his life. In 1660 came the culminating and least consolable misery in the total ruin of his cause; the utter conflagration of all his hopes; the scattering of dust and ashes over all his glory; the giving of his fruit unto the caterpillar, and his labour unto the grasshopper; the sight of the corpse of Freedom, done to death by vile stabs, and left there to be trampled under the hoofs of swine. Even at this far-off day we can hardly think of the epoch of the Stuart Restoration—its public disgraces; its private in-

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famies ; its mean and revolting tyranny ; its lick-spittle servility ; its reversion from virtuous and noble manhood to the lewdness of the ape and the cunning ferocity of the tiger—without a blush of shame. It was, as Macaulay says, a day “of servitude without loyalty, and sensuality without love ; of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices ; the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds ; the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave.” How must such a man as Milton have felt, amid

“ The barbarous dissonance  
Of Bacchus and his revellers ! ”

His cause was lost ; his ideals in the dust ; his enemies triumphant ; his friends dead on the scaffold, or exiled, or imprisoned ; his name infamous, his principles execrated, his property seriously impaired by the vicissitudes of the times. The body of the great Protector, by an infamously mean revenge which even Pagans had scorned, had been exhumed and hung on the gibbet ; his head rotted on Westminster Hall. Vane had perished on the scaffold, and they who saw him ride thither had seemed to see Virtue herself seated by his side. With vile ingratitude the corpse of the heroic Blake had been flung out of the Abbey. The cause which he deemed to be the cause of heaven had been shattered, as it were, with red hot thunderbolts ; his life was in peril ; his name was outraged by men whose



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fathers he would have disdained to set among the dogs of his flock ; and a degraded England, in her most degraded epoch, was complacently slobbering at the feet of a perjured rake who, in such religion as he retained amid his gross and endless adulteries, was a crypto-Romanist, and complacently pocketed the subsidies of France. Private losses and public miseries came on Milton in a flowing tide, with wave on wave. The Plague of 1665 turned the neighbourhood of his last home into pest-fields. The Great Fire of 1666 destroyed the last house which he possessed. If we would know what he felt, we must look at his last portrait, taken at the age of sixty-two. It is a face which, as it were, "deep scars of thunder had entrenched"; and yet it retained its severe composure, and shows English intrepidity mixed with unutterable sorrow. Life had indeed proved herself a cruel stepmother to that sweet child, to that royally endowed youth. It was in the "Samson Agonistes" that he unbosomed all his feelings. He, like Samson, was

"Eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves."

He, like Samson, could say :

"Nor am I in the list of them that hope ;  
Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless.  
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,  
No long petition—speedy death,  
The close of all my miseries, and the balm."

## GREAT BOOKS

In the magnificent chorus, "God of our Fathers," he expresses the awful perplexity of our souls as we face the afflictions, and apparently deadly wrongs, which God sends, not only to the common rout of men, who

"Grow up and perish as the summer fly,  
Heads without name, no more remembered,"

but even to those whom He had eminently adorned with gifts and graces; who, amid every complication of catastrophe, have to cry, "All thy waves and storms are gone over me." Yet, even under this immense accumulation of all the calamities which might have seemed most crushing, Milton could write of himself:

"Come, come; no time for lamentation now,  
Nor much more cause. Samson hath quit himself  
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished  
A life heroic."

And he could close his statuesque and monumental drama with such calm words of faith and hope as these:

"All is best, though we oft doubt  
What the unsearchable dispose  
Of Highest Wisdom brings about,  
And ever best found in the close."

19. And, indeed, for Milton, as for all God's children, there were alleviations. Fame, if that were anything, still reached his ears; and Dryden,

## MILTON

the poet-laureate in his later days, acknowledged his supremacy. Friends sought him out, and high-souled youths like John Phillips, and Cyriack Skinner, and Henry Lawrence, and the Quaker Thomas Ellwood, loved him and looked up to him. In 1665 he published the "Paradise Lost"; in 1670, the "Paradise Regained," and so completed the purpose of his life.

Above all, Milton was still Milton. We have two last glimpses of him. One is given us by the painter Richardson, who describes him, in 1671, with the bookseller Millington leading him by the hand. He is dressed in a green camlet coat, and no longer wears his small silver-hilted sword; he also describes him as he sat "in a grey coarse cloth at the door of his house in Bunhill Fields in warm sunny weather, to enjoy the fresh air." A little later on a Dorsetshire clergyman, Dr. Wright, saw him "in a small house, up one pair of stairs, sitting in an elbow chair, in black clothes, in a room hung with rusty green, neat enough, pale but not cadaverous, courteous and stately in manner, and his voice still musically agreeable." The end was not far off. On November 8, 1674, "the gout struck in," and with perfect calm and faith he passed, after the martyrdom of that life of hurricane and disappointment,

"To where beyond these voices there is peace."

## GREAT BOOKS

I have endeavoured to point out the characteristics of Milton's childhood, of his boyhood, of his youth, and early manhood. I think that the two leading characteristics of the troubled latter half of his life are indomitable fortitude and unswerving faith.

i. What is fortitude? Locke tells us that it is "the quiet possession of a man's self, and an undisturbed doing of his duty whatever evil beset him, or danger lies in his way." If so, was there any one who showed it more heroically than this poet, who, in his blindness, persecution, peril, and misery could yet write:

"I argue not  
Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot  
Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer  
Right onward."

ii. And as for unswerving faith, the principle of his life, even in youth was—

"All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Task-Master's eye."

And the law and hope of his life was, "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life."

And thus, amid the frightful welter of national and individual catastrophe which crashed in ruin about his later years, Milton was enabled, by the grace of God, with calm of mind and new acquist of experience, all passions spent, to wait in peaceful darkness for the unconceived dawn.

## MILTON

Here, then, are the high lessons which his life has to teach us : in childhood a sweet seriousness ; in boyhood a resolute diligence ; in youth, high self-respect, and the white flower of a blameless life ; in manhood, self-sacrificing energy and heroic public service ; and, amid the crowded agonies of all his later years, an inflexible fortitude, an indomitable faith. He, like Robert Browning, "believed in the soul and was very sure of God." And the truths he has chiefly to teach are that :

"Virtue could see to do what Virtue would  
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon  
Were in the flat sea sunk ;"

and

"He that has light within his own clear breast  
May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day ;  
But he that hath a dark soul and foul thoughts,  
Benighted walks under the midday sun ;  
Himself is his own dungeon."



THE IMITATION OF CHRIST





## THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

I HAVE spoken in these papers of the glory and the benefit of great books in general. I have pointed to the supreme imaginative grandeur of those mighty lessons which we may learn from Shakespeare, that "master of those who know." I have spoken of Milton, towering, like a colossal statue of antique Parian marble, over those low levels of sluggish life, "where every molehill is a mountain, and every thistle a forest tree." I have dwelt on the keen insight, homely wisdom, and spiritual faithfulness of John Bunyan, the immortal tinker of Bedford. I have devoted three papers to those lessons of consummate importance which we may learn from the "*Divina Commedia*" of Dante. If these papers have helped any, of my younger readers especially, to seek and to love that imperial society into which great books will admit them; if they have taught any one how to relieve the

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oppressive pettiness of life by seeking the crowned circle of poets "with their garlands and singing robes about them"; if they have induced any to profit by the wisdom of those from whom we all may learn "the great in conduct and the pure in thought"—then they will not have been in vain. They will have contributed, in their small measure, to uplift us above our own selfishness, to enlarge, and to brighten, the narrow and dim horizon of our little lives.

What the book is of which I am now about to speak, and why I speak of it, will best be learnt from this scene in the pages of a great work of fiction.

A young girl, full of imagination and sensibility, is painfully burdened with the trials and unsatisfied yearnings of life. Rebelling against her lot, fainting under its loneliness, her eyes often filling with idle tears, she is frightened by the sense that it was not difficult for her to become a very demon. In this mood, at once miserable and rebellious, she goes into her little attic to find relief in books. "She thought that it was part of the hardship of her life that there was laid upon her the burden of larger wants than others seemed to feel, that she was constantly troubled with a vague, hopeless yearning for that something, whatever it was, that was greatest and best on earth. Poor child! as she leaned her head against the window-frame, with her

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hands clasped tighter and tighter, and her foot beating the ground, she was as lonely in her trouble as if she had been the only girl in the civilised world. Her soul was untrained for inevitable struggles." Owing to the stereotyped inanity of her education, she had no share in the hard-won treasures of thought which generations of painful toil have laid up for the race of men. Her intellectual outfit, like that of thousands, consisted only of shreds and patches of feeble literature and false history; she had much futile "information," but no knowledge of those irreversible laws, without and within her, which, when they govern the habits, become morality, and when they develop the feelings, become religion. At last her eyes glanced over the books which lay on the window-shelf. Most of them she listlessly pushed aside, but she was caught by the name of one of them. She took up the little old clumsy volume with some curiosity; it had the corners turned down in many places, and some hand, now for ever quiet, had made at certain passages strong pen-and-ink marks, long since browned by time. Maggie turned from leaf to leaf, and read where the quiet hand pointed; and here were some of the things which she read from this old book:

"Know that the love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything in the world. If thou seekest this or that, and wouldest be here or there, to enjoy thine own will and pleasure, thou shalt never

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be quiet, nor free from care. In everything somewhat will be wanting ; and in every place there will be some that will cross thee. Above and below, which way soever thou turnest, thou wilt find the cross, and must have patience, if thou wilt have inward peace, and enjoy an everlasting crown. If thou desire to mount unto this height, thou must set out courageously, and lay the axe at the root of inordinate inclination to thyself, and to private and earthly good. Overcome self-love, and thou wilt have peace. Many have suffered much more than thou ; call to mind their sufferings, and thou shalt easier bear thy little adversities. But if thy troubles seem to thee not little, may not the cause be thine own impatience ? Blessed are those ears that receive the whispers of the divine voice, and listen not to the whisperings of the world. Blessed are they who seek not petty human falsities, but for the truth which teacheth inwardly."

This was what the young girl read ; and as she read such words, "a strange thrill of awe passed through her, as if she had been awakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling her of those whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor." She went on reading, and read :

"Why dost thou gaze about thee here, since this is not thy place of rest ? Earth is but thy passing journey heavenwards. All things pass away, and thou with them. Cleave not unto them, lest thou

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be entangled and perish. If a man should give up all, it is as nothing. The one thing necessary is that, having left all, he should leave himself, and go wholly out of himself, and retain nothing of self-love. Forsake thyself, resign thyself, then shall all vain imaginations, evil disturbances, superfluous cares fly away. Immoderate fear and inordinate love shall leave thee, and thou shalt have inward peace."

"Maggie," says the writer, "drew a long breath, and pushed her heavy hair back, as if to see a sudden vision of life more clearly. Here, then, was a secret of life that would enable her to renounce all other secrets. She must stand out of herself, she must regard her life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole. This voice out of the far-off Middle Ages was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience. It came to her as an unquestioned message. The reason why the small, old-fashioned book, for which you need only pay sixpence at a bookstall, works miracles to this day, turning bitter waters into sweetness, is because it was written down by a hand that waited for the heart's promptings; it is the chronicle of a solitary hidden anguish, struggle, trust and triumph: and so it remains, to all time, a lasting record of human needs and human consolations; the voice of a brother, who, years ago, felt, and suffered, and renounced; in the cloister perhaps, with serge gown

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and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours, but under the same silent, far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness."

Now what was the name of this book which the young girl found, and which taught her, as it may teach us, patience and self-renunciation; and thus to find peace amid the trials of life, and "the quotidian ague of its frigid impertinences"? It was the "Imitation of Christ," usually attributed to Thomas à Kempis. Its permanent and universal popularity shows how it can meet the wants and stir the feelings of the human heart. Not even the "Pilgrim's Progress," with the potent spell of its allegory, has reached the same astonishing pre-eminence of popularity. It is a proof that "the voice of the Sibyl"—*i.e.*, the voice of inspiration—as the old Greek thinker said, "uttering things simple and unperfumed, and unadorned, reaches through unnumbered years by the aid of God." The "Imitation of Christ" has been in men's hands for some five centuries. Its editions are to be counted by thousands, and though it was written by one of different nationality, of different life, of different religion from our own; though, since he was laid in his unknown grave, empires have risen and fallen, Churches have flourished and decayed—yet even here in England, and at this close of the

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nineteenth century, it is probable that nearly every person of any education possesses a copy of the book, and is familiar with those "brief, quivering sentences," which make us feel, while we read them, as if we had laid our hand upon the heart, throbbing with sorrows like our own, which beat so many centuries ago in the old monk's breast.

Who wrote this famous book? It cannot be known with certainty. The writer himself said, "Love to be unknown," and "Search not who spoke this or that, but attend to what is spoken." The glory of the authorship—though the writer held it mere vanity to seek for earthly glory—belongs either to Thomas à Kempis, a German monk, or Jean Gerson, ambassador of the King of France at the Council of Constance, and one of the grandest figures of his time.

Both of them lived in that dreary age of lead and iron, of political anarchy, and ecclesiastical degradation, of war, famine, misery and corruption which marked the early years of the fifteenth century. Thomas à Kempis, born in 1379, died at the age of ninety-two; Gerson, born in 1363, died at sixty-one. Thus they were contemporaries for forty-five years of their lives; but they were men of utterly different destinies. Thomas, son of a humble artisan, a copier of MSS., was received into a monastery at twenty-one, and lived in his cell for seventy-one years of almost unbroken calm and uneventful

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obscurity, most happy when he was alone *in angello cum libello* ( "in a little corner with a little book " ). Far different was the tumultuous, impassioned career of the Frenchman, Jean Gerson, " the most Christian doctor," as he was called. His life rang with combats and contradictions. Living in the perilous days of Azincour, and the Great Schism, in the days when a maniac was King of France, and a monster was Pope of Rome, he moved in thunderstorms. In religious controversy we find him now denouncing the autocracy of Popes in language which leads to his denunciation by Romish bishops as a precursor of the Reformation ; and now persuading the Council of Constance to burn John Huss, the Wycliffe of Bohemia. And when his life seemed to have culminated in one long failure ; when the University of Paris, of which he had become Chancellor at thirty-one, and whose authority he had so splendidly supported, was humiliated and crushed ; when he had to fly in disguise from land to land ; when he had wholly failed to elevate a sordid and avaricious episcopate, or reform an ignorant and corrupted priesthood ; thus forced to see how little is man even at his greatest, and how " man's nothing perfect " shrivels into insignificance before the all-completeness of God, the great Chancellor, who had been the soul of mighty Councils, and the terror of contumacious Popes, took his obscure refuge in a humble monastery, and



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there passed his days in deepest humility and submission. His earlier ambitions had faded from his soul like the burning hues of a stormy sunset ; but as, when the sunset crimson has faded, we see the light of the eternal stars, so, when the painted vapours of earthly objects had lost their colouring Gerson could gaze at last on those "living sapphires" which glow in the deep firmament of spiritual hopes. He who had taken an honoured place among Princes and Cardinals now gathered the little children round him, and leading them to the altar, taught them there to uplift their little innocent white hands to heaven and to pray for him, "Oh my God! Oh my Creator! have pity on thy poor servant, Jean Gerson!" So, with the little ones gathered round his dying bed, that he might breathe his last amid their purity and peace, died the greatest orator and leader of his day, and on his tomb they carved the two words, "*Sursum corda!*" ("Lift up your hearts").

But though both the humble German, Thomas à Kempis, and the fiery Frenchman, Jean Gerson, may have had some share in writing the "Imitation of Christ," it really has no single author. It is the legacy of ages, the gospel of all that was best in monasticism, "the psalter of the solitary, the epic poem of the inward life." It has been compared to a monastic garden, filled with "the white lilies of purity, the roses of divine love, the blue cyanias of

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heavenly meditation, the dark violets of mighty prayer." It is an outcome of the ascetic ideal, with its glorification of humility, labour and obedience. Its spirit is that of Saint Benedict, who, one evening, stood in the window of his monastery at Monte Cassino, and saw the wide world beneath him bathed in glory and sunshine, and, *inspexit et despexit*, "gazed on, and looked down upon it all." It recalls the stories of how St. Bernard, as a boy, plunged into the icy pool, and stood in it neck deep to subdue rebellious passions; and how they found St. Bonaventura washing the humblest vessels of his convent, when they came to offer him a cardinal's hat; and how, when he was asked the source of his astonishing knowledge, he pointed in silence to his crucifix: and how St. Francis of Assisi stripped himself of everything, and begged for the Church of God; and how St. Thomas Aquinas breathed the daily prayer, "Give me, O God, a noble heart, which no earthly affection can drag down," and how, when the vision appeared to him and said, "Thou hast written well of me, O Thomas, what reward dost thou desire?" he answered with meek rapture, "*Non aliam, nisi te, Domine*" ("No other reward than thyself, O Lord!") What the book mainly teaches is self-renunciation. It is the best expression of the eternal yearning of the soul, its profound self-questionings, its pathetic familiarity with the love of God in Christ. We are not

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called upon to be monks, or to hide ourselves in solitude :

“ We need not bid, for cloistered cell,  
Our neighbour and our work farewell,  
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high  
For sinful man beneath the sky ; ”

but yet we may learn from this book that, if we would escape “ the contagion of the world’s slow stain,” we must often be alone with our own thoughts, and that “ solitude is the audience chamber of God.” In an age of so much religious lacquer and sham as this is, when

“ We seek all lands from pole to pole,  
We chatter, nod, and hurry by,  
And never once possess our soul  
Before we die,”

how good for us to read in this book the chapters on thoroughly searching our own consciences, and on holy purposes of amendment ; how good it is to strengthen our conviction that God has revealed Himself in His works, and in His Son, so that, both without and within us, the natural and the supernatural coexist eternally, and God hath not left Himself without witness to any human soul.

The book abounds both in isolated sentences of deep value and in broad lessons.

Take, for instance, such sentences as these :  
“ Beware of much talk ; be alone with thyself, and enjoy thy God.”

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"More speedily is the outward enemy overcome if the inward man be not laid waste."

"First there cometh to the mind a bare thought, then a strong imagination of evil, then a delight therein, and a depraved motion, and then consent, and so, by little and little, our wicked enemy getteth complete entrance, when he is not resisted at the beginning."

I would specially, however, indicate two great lessons which we may learn from this book.

i. The first is the truth which the writer so well brings out—Romanist, and priest, and monk though he was—of the direct, perpetual, immediate, unimpeded access of the soul to God.

It is the very inmost virus of Romanism, and of all systems which imbibe its errors, that they would fain intrude human priests, imperfect as they always are—and grossly corrupt and unworthy as in age after age they have often been—into that awful solitude where the soul is alone with God: that they would thrust all sorts of human intermediaries between the soul and its Creator. Men are always trying to lean on broken reeds which pierce the hand, and do not approach God as a child, with all its sins, comes for forgiveness to its father. In this book there is no attempt to thrust a man that shall die—a man himself laden with imperfections, and who may not even be a good specimen of an ordinary man—between the soul and its Eternal Creator.

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There is no vulgarising of the deepest emotions to human eyes; no wearing of the soul upon the sleeve for daws to peck at; no dabbling of the profane hand of man in the secrets of the microcosm. The "Imitation of Christ" sends the penitent neither to Church nor Council, nor Pope, nor Priest, nor Saint, nor Angel, but to its Eternal God. It says, "Go fearlessly, O Prodigal, and clasp thy Saviour's very feet." It recognises the fundamental truth that "no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him; for it cost more to redeem their souls, so that he must let that alone for ever."

ii. Secondly, we may learn from it a most needful warning against the perils which beset an age of ease. Thousands have come, I know not how, to imagine that heaven may, so to speak, be "won in an easy chair," and that the crown of victorious amaranth will be dropped, quite naturally, on the dozing foreheads of the lounging, the idle, and full-fed. It is not so; it never can be so. Life is a warfare in which there is no discharge:

"Shall we be carried to the skies  
On slumbrous beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize  
And sailed thro' bloody seas?"

Not so! the body must be subdued, the flesh mortified, the passions mastered, the cross taken, the race run, the battle fought. We must ever be on the

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watch against gradual and against sudden temptation ; against sin, when it approaches as a creeping serpent, all noiseless glitter and secret fascination ; and when it crashes out upon us, "terrible, and with a tiger's leaps." We are naturally prone to sinful self-indulgence. We must strive to enter in at the strait gate, nor can we acquire our own souls without long and strenuous effort. A lax view of sin, as this book will teach us, is simply a false view of sin.

" A spotless child sleeps on the flowering moss.  
'Tis well for him ; but when a sinful man,  
Envyng such slumber, may desire to put  
His guilt away, shall he return to peace  
At once by lying there ? Our sires knew well  
The fitting course for such : dark cells, dim lamps,  
A stone floor one may writhe on like a worm,  
No mossy pillow blue with violets ! "

These are two of the great lessons of life which this book will teach us—the duty and privilege of going direct to God : the peril of a careless, easy, and unwatchful life, that lives only to eat, and drink, and sleep, and get money, and indulge its own evil desires. But no purely human book is perfect. The "Imitatio Christi" is too sad ; too little cognisant that God allows and wishes us to live, not only under "the tenebrous avenues of cypress," but also in the glad natural light of His countenance, in a world wrapped round with sweet air, and filled with sunshine, and abounding in knowledge. It also

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teaches too great a self-absorption in the working out of our own salvation with fear and trembling, We must not "expand our selfishness to infinitude" and call that religion. We must ever remember that love to God is most acceptably shown by love to our fellow-man. 'On these defects I will not dwell. The author of the "Imitation of Christ" was a saint: the saints are but, as Luther said, "dewdrops on the head of the Bridegroom, lost in the glory of His hair." Their brightest lustre is but as the dim earthshine reflected from our planet upon the unilluminated orb of its crescent satellite. All other teaching, however saintly, can but bring home to us a part of the divine teaching of Christ. It requires to be corrected and completed by this, the very word of God: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou—Thou only, Thou for ever—Thou hast the words of eternal life":

" Yea, thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning,  
Christ shall suffice us, for He hath sufficed ;  
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning ;  
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."





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